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The Scarlet Schooner;

OR,

THE NEMESIS OF THE SEA.

A Romance of Salt Water, and a Sequel
to "Don Diablo."

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "DON DIABLO," "THE CHEVALIER
CORSAIR," "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MON-
TEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE DOOMED CARAVEL.

THE wind howls along the waters, lashing
them into a tempest, and hurling giant waves
upon the beautiful shores of Cuba, with a force
that makes the very rocks tremble.

The feathery palm and cocoa trees bend like
bows to the blast, and the air is filled with light

objects that the storm-fiend drives along with
relentless fury.

Heavy clouds, inky in their blackness, hang
like a huge funereal pall upon the ocean, and
sweep landward with the speed of a race-
horse.

Blue, vivid lightning plays with ghastly effect
upon the wild waters, and bursts of thunder
roll overhead, to add to Nature's fierce anger
and make up the terrible discord of the hurri-
cane.

Though the sun has not yet set, the day seems
like night-time in its gloom.

And yet, upon the seething bosom of the wild
waters, a vessel is visible, struggling with the
agony of a human being to save itself from the
clutch of death.

It is a small craft, graceful as a swan, and of
the class known in Cuban waters as a three-
masted *caravel*; but under the blast of the re-
lentless tornado her slender masts are stripped
of canvas, and she is driving before the gale
under bare poles.

Upon her decks a score of men are visible,

lashed to bulwarks and rigging, and doing all
in their power to save their vessel.

Stern, resolute, and with his eyes fixed alter-
nately upon his vessel and the storm, stands a
man who seemingly disdains to lash himself to
the taffrail or wheel to save his life, but clings
to the latter with one hand, that the mad waves
cannot wrench off.

No dread rests on his dark, handsome face, as
to what may be his fate, but rather a look of
utter recklessness.

Turning his dark eyes landward he suddenly
discovers through the driving storm a ruined
quinta, with its grayish-white walls appearing
above the bending palms upon the heights, while
further inland is a *puebla*, or villa, its strong
walls and turrets standing firm against the
hurricane's rude shocks.

"Jose, these mad waters and the driving
tempest have deceived me, for we are more than
a league nearer shore than I believed."

The voice of the speaker was calm, and his
manner showed not that he felt the worst must
come, for he even smiled as he saw the startled



THERE WAS SOMETHING SO APPALLING IN HIS DEFIANCE OF FATE AT SUCH A TIME THAT JOSE MORENA TREMBLED WITH HORROR.

look upon the face of the one he addressed, and who, though firmly lashed to the wheel, clung to it with both hands.

"Oh, señor, is there any hope?" gasped the man, who wore an undress American uniform.

"I fear not, Jose Morena, for do you see yonder point of land far ahead?"

"Yes, señor."

"Well, that is a rocky arm that extends far out into the sea, and forms the bay upon our port bow, and we are scudding directly upon it."

"But, señor captain, something can be done to save us," cried the man, eagerly.

"I should like to know what, for every stitch of our canvas has been blown to ribbons, and if we had any, nothing would hold against this tornado, and yonder reef of rocks alone can check our mad flight through these seething waters."

"And then—?"

"Why, the *caravel* will be knocked into kindling wood," said the other, with a reckless smile.

"And what will become of us, señor?"

"For myself only will I speak, Jose; *I shall live*."

"And poor Jose Morena, señor?" groaned the other.

"You and the rest will die, good Jose, but *I* will not," was the cool reply.

And hardly had the words left his lips when a mountain wave came pouring over the vessel in a deep cascade, a roaring waterfall of many feet, sweeping forward with a force and fury that were terrific.

And amid the roar of waters, the roll of thunder and the howling winds, was heard the agonized cry of man for help that could not be given, for mercy the relentless elements would not show, for life that must be lost.

The *caravel*, after a desperate effort, shook off the vast weight of water, and rose buoyantly to the surface, but one-half of her crew had been swept away, her half-dozen guns had been torn from their lashings and dashed through the stout bulwarks into the sea.

But the dark-faced, stern captain's gripe yet remained firm, and his clutch upon the wheel was the same as before the monster wave swept down upon the devoted craft.

And Jose Morena's life also was safe, but his face was as pallid as a corpse, and seeing it the captain gave a light laugh, and said:

"Jose, half of my men went to the devil on that wave, and I thought you would be torn off, too; but your time will soon come."

"The Virgin preserve me, señor; I am no coward in battle, or in facing my fellow-man, but when brought face to face with God's anger, my sins cause me to tremble in terror. Oh that there were a padre here to absolve us."

"I ask no absolution at any man's hands or lips, Jose Morena."

"When I die it shall be as I have lived, without fear."

"Oh! captain, do not be thus defiant in this awful hour," pleaded the man.

"Don't preach to me, Jose Morena; you may follow after your companions and perish, but *I* shall not die."

"No, no, there is too much unfinished work in the world for me to do yet, and it is not my fate to perish now."

"By and by, when I have lived my allotted space, but not now, not now."

He spoke more to himself than to his companion, and there was something so appalling in his defiance of Fate at such a time that Jose Morena trembled with horror, and muttered:

"We are sure to be lost, señor; there can be no hope."

"Not I, man; you, yes, and the *caravel* will go to pieces, but there are other vessels as fleet; all of my crew will become food for fishes, but there are other men as brave, and ere long I will again sail the blue waters with a strange craft, and strange seamen to man her, and ask no odds of wind and wave."

"*Jesu Maria!*" murmured Jose, in a trembling voice.

"Thy prayers will not aid thee, Jose Morena."

"I pray for you, my captain."

"Keep your prayers for yourself, then, for I need them not."

"Then I shall cling to thee, good señor, when the shock does come; oh, see, sir, there rises the cliff ahead, and hark! how the sea dashes upon it, and the wind howls so mournfully."

"Oh, Heaven have mercy! oh, captain! oh! good señor! we are lost, lost!"

He fairly shrieked the last words, as another huge wave boarded the driving vessel, and his voice mingled with the death shrieks of his comrades who were swept away.

But once more the *caravel* rose from the surge, and again drove forward with a speed that was terrific.

The daring man who had been so defiant in the face of death, still stood at his post, and Jose Morena also clung to the wheel, though it had cracked beneath their weight and the deluge of waters hurled upon it.

Glancing forward, after dashing the spray from his eyes, the captain seized Jose Morena

by the shoulder and pointed to the crewless decks, while he cried, in an almost exultant tone:

"See! my crew have gone, Jose Morena, and we two alone remain; and you will die, in spite of your prayers and your clinging grasp, for we are driving straight upon the point of rocks."

"The tornado holds us in its grasp, and this craft is but the toy of Destiny."

He ceased speaking, and glanced out over the fearful scene, for, though daylight, the darkness of twilight was upon the sea.

The *caravel*, with its wheel lashed, and without an inch of canvas, was driving over the sea before the tornado, and not half a league away rose the peninsula, which jutting out from the mainland in the shape of a bent arm, formed a bay inland, and into which the vessel had driven before the wind.

And as he gazed, his face still reckless and resolute, and poor Jose Morena groaned in agony, there came another giant wall of water upon the devoted little vessel.

"Now, Jose Morena, your time has come," shouted the defiant captain, and in answer there arose the piercing cry:

"Mercy, captain! oh! *Jesu Maria* save me! save—"

There was a snapping of wood, a roaring of waters, howling of winds, and the wave swept on, and upon its bosom, valiantly struggling for life, was Jose Morena.

And he who had said he would not die?

Stood against the shattered wheel, clinging with one hand, while the other hung useless at his side, for it had been broken above the elbow.

Grimly smiling, he muttered:

"I told him he would die; but, even with this broken arm *I shall live*."

"Now for the last struggle."

Releasing the wheel as he spoke, he suddenly sprung into the sea, just as the *caravel* bounded high upward as though to leap the rocky barrier beneath her bows, and came down with a crash that shattered her strong hull into fragments, while the mad waves roared, the thunders rolled, and the wind shrieked, as though in a laughing chorus at the wreck and death the tornado had caused to those who dared face its fury.

CHAPTER II.

NITA SABINAS.

SOME forty leagues from the city of Havana, and on the southern shore of Cuba, there is a picturesque bay, indented with numerous rocky inlets.

No town is visible upon its shores, and the only craft that visits the secluded spot are the coffee droghers of the plantations along the coast, and the waters are occasionally enlivened by a pretty pleasure yacht, belonging to some of the *pueblas* that here and there dot the scene landward.

Upon the point of land, the earthen arm that forms the shelter to the bay, and curves out a league into the sea, stands an old ruin, one of the guard-towers used by the Spaniards long years before.

Within the arch of this ruin were two persons, one of whom was reclining in a Mexican hammock, swung between the tower walls, while the other sat upon an embroidered mat upon the stone flooring engaged in some piece of fancy-work, which was occasionally interrupted to give the swinging couch a gentle push to keep it in motion.

That the two stood in the relationship of mistress and maid there could be no doubt, and yet there seemed to be that familiarity between them which a superior of a kindly nature will ever hold toward a trusted servitor.

The one in the hammock was a maiden who had scarcely reached her sixteenth year, and yet, under the warm Southern sun of the "ever faithful isle," had already budded forth into loveliest womanhood, for her form was a model of beauty and symmetry.

Her face was bronzed, yet the complexion was exquisite, and each feature was perfect, and, in spite of her youth, character of a high order was stamped upon mouth, chin and brow.

Her eyes were large, strikingly so, melting one moment with softness, and flashing the next, if excited, with all the dark intensity of her nature.

One who would idolize instead of love, and whose hate would be as undying as an Indian's. Nita Sabinas certainly was one to forgive almost any wrong of the one she adored, but if wronged by a devotion of that idol to another, one to become a Nemesis in her avenging passion.

Attired in a soft, silky dress, with one tiny, slippered foot half-hanging from the hammock, her wealth of inky hair, escaped from its ivory comb, falling upon the mat beneath her, a guitar in her hands and a discarded portfolio of drawings by her side, the lovely Cuban maiden swung to and fro, lightly running her fingers over the strings of the instrument, and yet seemingly building castles in the air, for her thoughts seemed not with the scene and the present.

Alena, her maid, was a few years older and an octoroon, with the blood of the Indian, the

first rulers of the isle, the negro and the white man in her veins.

She also possessed marked beauty, and the hand of slavery upon her had not marred her brow, or taken from the brightness of her eyes or the roundness and grace of her form.

A petted domestic she was dressed neatly and with taste, and her ears were hung with dazzling gems and her fingers were ornamented with rings, evidently gifts from her fair young mistress and the household she served.

"Alena, I am tired of this guitar, I cast my sketching aside half-finished, I do not like my hammock, and feel strangely out of sorts today."

"What ails me?" and the beautiful maiden sprung out of the hammock and turned to her maid to answer the vexed question.

In perfect Spanish Alena replied, also rising:

"I fear it is the weather, for there is a tornado brewing, *Señorita Nita*," and she cast her eyes around the horizon of sea and land.

"Oh, that would be delightful, for I have so longed to witness a hurricane from this ruined *quinta*," said *Señorita Sabinas*, joyfully, and after casting a look over the waters she continued:

"You are right, Alena, for there rises a dark cloud yonder; and see, far off on the horizon is a sail; the Virgin Mother protect it if *el tornado* strikes it."

"I hope it may not be your brother's, Don Isadoro's, *goleta*, *señorita*."

"Heaven grant not, Alena; but it lies becalmed upon the waters, and whoever sails her must take the chances of life and death."

"Ah! what dangerous lives these sailors lead: if I were to be a sailor's bride, Alena, I would never let him leave me; no, no, I would face the dangers of the deep with him."

"But, *Señorita Nita* will not be a sailor's bride," said Alena, in a low tone.

"Ah me! I suppose not, as my father has already told me I must marry Don Basilio La Roque."

"I wish I was a poor girl, Alena, and not the daughter of the wealthy planter Don Carlos Sabinas, and then I would be allowed to marry where my heart led me."

As though the thought was annoying, she patted the ground with her little foot for an instant, and then turning, threw herself down upon a mossy bank without the tower, and said pettishly:

"I'll resume my sketching, Alena; bring me my portfolio."

The maid obeyed, and Nita opened it upon a half-finished sketch, most artistically executed, of the scene spread out before her.

Resuming her pencil, she gazed upon the picturesque view, full of grandeur and beauty.

The shores were wild and wooded, sloping toward the sea, here and there fronting the dark flood beneath with precipitous walls of rocks.

The plume-like palm and cocoa trees lifted their tops above the cliffs, and the crevices of the rocks were filled with clinging vines, while brilliant colored wild-flowers dotted the hill-sides and banks.

Stretching out from this scene of beauty, beyond the tower, was the headland that sheltered the bay, and its sterile, black, forbidding rocks, showed no sign of the rich foliage and vegetation that clothed the mainland with perpetual beauty.

Beyond was the blue sea, calm as a mill-pond, and at her feet were the curving shores of the bay, also undisturbed by a single ripple, while far away in the distance was visible the single sail, its sails flapping as it rose and fell upon the swell.

Inland were the *haciendas*, or *casas de campo* of the wealthy islanders, surrounded by their vast coffee and sugar estates, with the little *quartier*, or negro village nestling near the mansion.

In the interior, to the north, the lofty mountains rose blue and bold, their summits reflecting the sunlight, and the plains at their base also dotted with white *pueblas*, the homes of Cuban planters.

In an opening of the forest, and a quarter of a mile from the tower, a favorite resort of the maiden, was her own home, its white walls and vermillion turrets standing out in bold relief against the dark-green foliage beyond.

From the *azotea*, or flat roof of the stately villa, arose the red turrets, or towers, for the house was one of those ancient Spanish country mansions, still often met with in Cuba.

It was vast in size, with wings and courts, or plazas, one-story high, and the walls were painted white.

On the side toward the ruined tower on the hill was a *porte cochère*, or carriage-way, that led to the plaza within, and upon which the rooms opened.

In this *patio*, or court, was a huge fountain, surrounded by orange colored vases filled with gorgeous plants and flowers.

Through the tall grated windows opening upon sea and land, could be seen the sleeping-room, with heavy crimson curtains, to shut out the light, while the sitting-room and parlors had drapery of lace and rose-colored silk.

There was an air of luxury and grandeur per-

vading the villa within doors, that accorded well with the elegance of the surroundings and beauty of the scenery without.

A small chapel, with its cross of gold, adjoined the villa on the right, and upon all sides were gardens of flowers and ornamental trees, with avenues of evergreens running down to the shores of the bay.

Beyond were the negro village, and the out-houses of the hacienda, all on the same grand scale.

Such was the scene that Nita Sabinas, the Cuban beauty, gazed upon, while her skilled hand guided the pencil upon its work.

Suddenly she started to her feet with a half-cry of terror, dropping her portfolio upon the ground, while Alena, who had been having a peaceful siesta, also sprung up with a cry of alarm and muttered her prayers, as the whole island seemed to shake beneath the peals of terrific thunder that burst from the heavens.

While sketching, she had forgotten the rising storm, until the livid flash and thunder roar came, startling her by its suddenness.

But now that she saw the inky storm-clouds trailing over the sea, and beheld the tornado rushing landward with irresistible fury, she became perfectly calm, and with her dark mantilla drawn around her form, stood gazing with admiration upon the tempest that was enough to make the stoutest heart tremble with dread.

"Come, Señorita Nita, let us hasten to the hacienda," cried Alena, sinking upon her knees within the vine-covered ruin, and still muttering her prayers.

"Nonsense, Alena, I do not fear the storm, so shall remain here; if you are afraid go to the villa."

"I will not leave you, señorita; but your father will fear for you."

"My father is not at the hacienda, as you know, Alena, to know that I am here; but see! the tornado has struck the *goleta* and it is lost from sight in the spray and gloom."

"Holy Mother grant, whoever be on that vessel, that they go not down under the tempest."

A moment she gazed earnestly at the spot where she had last seen the vessel, and then said, quickly:

"Alena, my glass!"

The slave sprung to her feet and placed in the hands of the maiden a spy-glass, a magnificent instrument with silver tubes and gems set in the rims around the glasses.

Placing it to her eye she arranged the focus to suit her vision, and after a long look exclaimed:

"It is a *caravel*, Alena, for I see her now, driving like a specter vessel through the storm."

"But it is a larger vessel than my brother's *goleta*, yet she heads this way."

"Then it must be Don Isodoro's *goleta*, Donna Nita, for what other vessel like her would be standing toward the bay?" answered Alena.

"She heads directly for the entrance to the bay, as though she knew the channel, and if she puts her helm hard down and runs sharp to the south, after passing Traitor Rock, I will know that it is my brother, for no other pilot would dare run into the bay in such a tornado."

A moment she dropped the glass from her eye, and glancing around upon the now terrifically sublime scene, calm where she stood, a raging tempest a league away, she cried, with admiration:

"*Por mi vida!* Alena, but this is a grand sight, and an awful one."

"Oh, Donna Nita, the *goleta*, the *goleta*!" suddenly cried the octoroon, pointing seaward.

Quickly the lustrous eyes were turned seaward, and from the red lips broke a cry of alarm, for suddenly increasing in fury the tornado had torn the lateen sails of the *caravel* to threads, and hurled it upon its beam-ends.

With dread and hope commingled the maiden and slave gazed upon the gallant craft, and, with her spy-glass to her eye, Donna Nita cried in trembling tones:

"Mother of God have mercy! The sea sweeps the crew into the waves; ah! there a tall form springs to the wheel, and the remaining seamen spring to obey his orders."

"Yes, they are setting sail—Ha! Heaven I thank Thee! she rights once more; but there again goes her canvas into ribbons."

"Yet she drives on now before the tempest like a mad racer, and—I can see no more for the tornado shuts out my view."

"Oh, Donna Nita, see! *el ojo del huracan*! Come, señorita, let us fly to the hacienda for safety," cried Alena, in wild, pleading accents, as the skies suddenly presented a fearfully ghastly light, that spread over the sea and land in advance of the hurricane, almost shutting out objects from view, and yet rolling over the sea in red waves not unlike the aurora borealis in the heavens, though reflected from a single point or focus, which was the "eye of the tempest."

Behind this baleful glare came the tornado, and trailing blackness, while the very earth

trembled beneath the roar of waters, howling of winds and rattle of thunder-peals.

Nearer and nearer came the tornado, the *ojo del huracan* changing its hues as it approached, the red fading into violet and the violet into inky blackness, until again it changed and the very waves seemed to be on fire beneath its lurid glare.

"God have mercy upon that craft!" cried Nita Sabinas, springing back into the tower and dropping upon her knees by the side of the frightened Alena.

But scarcely had she disappeared within the ruin, when the scene of calm on shore was broken, and the hurricane leaped upon the land that shook beneath its shock, and hurling down rocks, uprooting trees, and crashing through the forest it went on with a force, ferocity and uproar which no pen can describe.

Stones were hurled from the tower, and swept away like leaves; large rocks were split from the cliffs and fell into the seething waters of the bay, while the rain and sheets of flaming lightning descended together, and thunder peal succeeded thunder peal with the roar of a ceaseless battle.

Kneeling back in the tower, protected from the fierce tempest, Nita Sabinas gazed spell-bound upon the fearful sight of Nature in a passion, while poor Alena, shrieking forth her prayers to the Virgin, crouched down in a dark corner, a pitiable object of terror.

Presently a cry broke from Nita's lips:

"See! it is the *goleta*!"

"She has entered the bay and drives straight upon the rocks at our very feet; oh, Alena! girl! arouse from your fright and behold!"

But Alena only prayed the louder, and crouched the closer in the corner of the tower, while her mistress sprung to her feet, and clinging to the hammock, gazed forth upon the weird, fearful scene.

Across the bay the *goleta* was driving, and she knew that under bare poles it must strike the rocks a hundred feet beneath where the tower stood, and that all on board must perish.

"Oh! Rather above, even prayer to Thee will not save them now—all must die!"

She covered her face with her hands to shut out the hideous sight of a noble vessel rushing to ruin and death, and when she again looked, saw that it was much nearer the rocky arm of the land, and driving still more swiftly to destruction.

"Ha! there stands that same tall form I before saw, and he is lashed to the wheel."

"No, no, he leaves it to grasp at that poor comrade who is torn from his hold on the bulwark—he misses him, but has returned in safety to the wheel, to which another also clings."

"See how coolly he gazes around upon the awful scene, as though he knew not fear—Ha! that cruel wave has swept the decks clear of all—no, no, he lives, and one other; they are still safe at the wheel."

"Oh Heaven! that sea will sink the gallant craft; no, it rises once more, and he alone lives. I could love that brave, noble man, and, Mary Mother, save him from death, I plead to you from my inmost heart."

She sunk on her knees as she uttered the short prayer, and when she again looked upon the vessel she saw the tall form suddenly leave the wheel and spring into the sea, while the next instant the little *caravel* went upon the rocks with a force that seemed to loosen them from their very foundation.

"Come, Alena! come, girl! he is not dead, and I yet may save him," shouted the Cuban maiden, and gathering her dress around her she darted out of the tower down toward the shore, unmindful of the furious hurricane and her own safety.

Down the rocky steep, with the spray dashing over her, the rain falling in torrents upon her, and the winds almost taking her breath away, she went to the shore, upon which the rocks were piled in wild confusion.

A short distance away, upon a jutting rock, was the *caravel*, breaking in pieces, that would be torn loose and hurled shoreward by the mad waters.

Out over the seething foam she gazed earnestly, and to her lips arose a cry of joy, for amid the tossing *débris* of the wreck she beheld one human form, and she saw that he was alive and was manfully struggling to live.

Nearer and nearer he came to the shore, and then was in the breakers, to be hurled away by a rude wave.

"He shall not die before my eyes," cried the brave girl, and unfastening her mantilla she tore it in several pieces, tied them together with a firm hand, and attaching to one end a small piece of timber from the wreck, threw it out to the grasp of the struggling man.

He clutched it, just as a third time a wave was dragging him back, and holding on with the tenacity that a drowning man can do, was firmly held there by the maiden until the surge of the waters backward momentarily ceased.

Then, exerting all her strength, and calling to him to do likewise, she drew him shoreward, his feet touched the sands and he tottered out beyond the reach of the waves.

That man was the one who had said to Jose

Morena that he would not die, and he had kept his word.

But better had it been for Nita Sabinas had he sunk to the depths of the sea.

CHAPTER III.

A WOMAN'S LOVE.

ONE pleasant afternoon, some two months after the tornado described in the foregoing chapter, Nita Sabinas was sleeping upon the roof of her *casa*, for it was the hour of *siesta*, an hour when all Cuba delights to rest.

Above her was stretched a silk awning, so tilted as to be a shade from the sun sinking westward.

Her form was reclining upon a bamboo settee, and beneath her lovely head was a silken pillow, while by her side sat Alena, the octoroon a fan in her hand, which she moved spasmodically, for both had yielded to the dreamy influence of the hour.

In the *patio* beneath, the slaves of the household were also sleeping, soothed by the balmy air, and all Nature seemed in repose, though not yet had

"Night's dark wing o'er the earth been thrown."

Upon another part of the *casa*, also sheltered by an awning of silk, but reclining in a hammock, was the form of a man, and the curl of smoke arising from a *cigarrito* between his lips showed that one person at least was awake in that time of dreamy repose and security which characterizes the interior of a Cuban mansion in that climate of luxurious indulgence.

Tossing his *cigarrito* suddenly away with an air of petulance, he arose to his feet and gazed seaward.

"Ha! a sail; and it is the *goleta* of Don Isodoro Sabinas," he exclaimed, as his quick eye caught sight of a lateen-rigged vessel far out upon the sea, and heading for the entrance to the bay.

As he stood up, his tall, well-knit form drawn to its full height, the same dark, stern face seen on the *caravel*, the day of the tornado was revealed.

It was a strangely fascinating face, though a little stern, and stamped with a certain recklessness that was seemingly called there by a life of adventure and danger; but there was an air of refinement and high breeding that denoted that he had been born and reared a gentleman.

He was dressed in a blue navy undress jacket, white pants, a buff vest, and upon his shoulders were the straps of a naval officer of the United States of the rank of captain.

As he again turned to gaze upon the distant sail, it was observable that he wore his left arm in a silken sling, and the sunlight falling full upon his face showed that it was haggard and bore traces of recent suffering.

Long and intently he looked upon the sail in the offing, and his brow grew dark, and his eyes burned as if in anger, while, muttering between his shut teeth something that sounded strangely like an oath, he began to pace the *azotea* with the quick, firm tread of one at home on a ship's quarter-deck.

Presently his evidently angry thoughts found voice, for he said, in an earnest undertone, communing with himself aloud:

"*Número de Dios!* why does not the laggard come?"

"He certainly received my letter, for that man on Don Isodoro's *goleta* would not dare turn traitor to me."

"But he does not come, and here is the Don's yacht running in, when it was not expected for a week or more."

"I trust no suspicion has arisen in his mind to bring him back so soon."

"I know that he does not like me, though I must say he treated me kindly, as does his father; but then the seed of distrust is in the heart of the young man, and the father has in view the marriage with an *caballero noble* of Spain, and not with an *Americano*."

"Ha! ha! ha! well, we shall see, my noble dons, who shall win the game at stake; it is a high one, and I shall play it to the bitter end."

For some moments he stood in silence, glancing mechanically down into the court, where still slumbered the slaves, upon the fountain, the tessellated pavement, the flowers of many hues, and then upon the grand old mansion.

Then he once more turned his gaze seaward, and cried, in a joyous tone, as his eyes lighted up brilliantly:

"*Madre de Dios!* it is the lugger."

The voice awakened Nita Sabinas from her slumber, and her sudden start brought Alena, the octoroon, to her feet, and both turned their eyes upon the one who had aroused them, seeing which he advanced rapidly along the roof to where the maiden stood, and said, in a voice that was soft and winning:

"Pardon, Señorita Nita, for rudely disturbing you, but yonder sail, your brother's *goleta* returning, surprised me."

"Ah, it is Isodoro's vessel, and she is entering the channel; and there is another craft under the shadow of the land."

"See, Señor Aubrey, the lugger also heads for our bay."

*"The eye of the hurricane;" also called "The Light of Hell," in the Caribbean Sea.—THE AUTHOR.

"True, it is doubtless a coffee drogher from some coffee plantation down the coast, putting in for water or provisions."

"A very trim-looking vessel for a drogher, captain, for she possesses a graceful hull and is certainly rigged like a pleasure craft," answered Nita, surveying the stranger attentively.

"You have a sailor's eye, sweet Nita, to so quickly discover the fine points of that vessel; but, tell me, what can have brought your brother back so soon from Havana?"

"I cannot tell you, señor: I hope no accident has befallen him."

"I sincerely trust not; a glass, please, Alena," and he turned to the octoroon, who descended from the roof for an instant to soon return with a spy-glass.

"You can retire now, Alena, and say to Pablo that my brother's yacht is returning," said Nita, to the slave, as the officer turned the glass upon the *goleta*, and said slowly, as the maid disappeared:

"The vessel looks all right, fair Nita; but your brother is pacing his deck with bent head and angry tread, if I may judge from his bearing at this distance."

"What can have angered him I wonder? I trust he has no *duello* on his hands," answered Nita, feelingly.

Captain Aubrey turned suddenly toward the maiden, and taking her hand said in a low tone:

"I fear I can tell you, *cara mia*, why he looks angered, and has returned; it is because he dislikes me, and wishes that I had left the Sabinas *casa de campo* forever."

She turned her eyes upon him, and they were filled with tears, while she responded:

"Austin, I dread to think that you speak the truth; but as you have now spoken of the dislike my brother feels for you, I will be frank with you and say that he has forbidden me to love you."

"I told him that I had dragged you from the sea and nursed you back to life, and that I loved you with all my heart; but then he spoke to my father upon the subject and he too commanded me to forget you."

"But I too am a Sabinas and have a will of iron, and refused."

"Then Isodoro told me that one, a caballero who met you here, said you were not an Americano, nor an officer, but—"

"But what, Nita?" asked the man, calmly, and with a quiet smile.

"Oh, it is horrible to believe he would say of you so vile a thing, but I will tell you; he said you were one upon whose head a price was set."

"Why did you not tell me of this before?"

"Because I dared not, and my brother said he would go to Havana and bring proof of what you were, and trusting you I waited."

"And were he to come now and make that charge against me, Nita?" and he bent his fascinating eyes full upon her own.

"I would not believe them if they swore it by the Mother Mary."

"And if I were to ask you to prove you love me, would you do so?"

"Try me!"

"I may; see your brother has landed, and he approaches the hacienda."

"Yes, and he is not alone, and those with him are strangers; who can they be?"

"My enemies, perhaps," he said, with a light smile; but his manner was cool and resolute, as he asked the maiden to excuse him for a moment, and descended from the *azotea* to his room.

But almost immediately he returned, and over his shoulders was thrown a Spanish cloak, and the quick eyes of Nita Sabinas detected the glimmer of arms beneath its folds.

"Oh! Austin, what danger do you dread that you thus arm yourself?" she cried, in alarm.

"I dread no danger, Nita mine; I am only prepared to meet whatever may be forced upon me," was the smiling reply, and he turned, as a handsome, bronze-faced young Cuban ascended to the *azotea*, and, with three companions, advanced toward where the two stood.

With a pale face, flashing eyes, and determined manner the Cuban confronted the resolute man and the trembling maiden, and said sternly:

"Nita, my sister, go to your room and leave that man to me!"

"Brother, I obey no commands from you; this gentleman is the guest of our house, and for shame that one of its members, its heir, should offer insult to him," was the ringing response of the beautiful girl.

"Nita, that man whom you call a gentleman, is no American officer, as he represents himself, is not Captain Austin Aubrey, but he is one whose name is a terror on land and sea, and is none other than *Don Diablo, the Red Corsair*."

A startled cry came from the white lips of Nita Sabinas, and she tried to speak, but her words found no utterance, and she tottered and would have fallen; but springing toward her the man who had been denounced as the famous buccaneer chief, passed one arm around her waist, and drawing her to him, drew a dagger from beneath his cloak and cried, sternly:

"Be I who I may, stand aside and let me pass, or I drive this blade to her heart."

CHAPTER IV.

THE FLIGHT.

To depict the feeling of Isodoro Sabinas, when he saw the tables so thoroughly turned upon him by the daring man he had denounced as *Don Diablo*, the famous corsair, and whom he hoped to capture, would be impossible.

Devoted to his sister above all other human beings, he had, when suspicion was cast upon the man who was their guest, wished to save her from an alliance with him; and, to satisfy himself whether he was really Austin Aubrey, the alleged American officer, or none other than *Don Diablo* the pirate in disguise, he had gone to Havana and gleaned all the information he could regarding the rover.

He had also received from the Governor-General a miniature likeness of the chief, which had been found in the possession of some maiden he had deceived, and was convinced that the guest at Villa del Florida, as his home was called, was none other than the corsair.

The likeness had the same dark, fascinating face, with the brilliant black eyes, and the resolute, reckless mouth, half-hidden by a dark mustache.

True, the miniature seemed the likeness of a younger man than was the one who called himself Austin Aubrey, for the face seemed not to represent one over twenty-three or four, while his guest was fully forty, though he did not look so to a casual observer.

Shipwrecked as he was by the tornado, and his life saved by Nita Sabinas, *Don Isodoro* and his father both felt that he was a dangerous personage to be thrown in the society of the loved sister and daughter.

But then he was their guest, and what could they do?

Nothing, unless they went beyond the bounds of hospitality.

But when a neighboring planter said that he was confident that Austin Aubrey was playing a part, Isodoro had determined to save his sister, and hence his trip in his yacht to Havana.

There he learned that a small American vessel, though of Cuban build and rig, had been seized upon the coast of Florida by a band of outlaws, who had boldly boarded her, in the absence of the greater part of the crew ashore, and run her out to sea.

This occurred but a couple of weeks before the loss of the vessel in the bay, and among the *débris* on the rocks were articles marked with the name of the American craft, which was the *San Juan*.

As this little cruiser was commanded by Captain Austin Aubrey, Isodoro Sabinas came to the conclusion, all things being considered, that his guest was not what he represented himself.

Sailing to Key West he found there an officer of the runaway vessel, and showed him the miniature likeness of *Don Diablo*.

"Is this your captain, señor?" he asked.

"By no means, sir," was the reply.

"Do you know who it is a likeness of?" was the next query.

"It resembles the daring buccaneer who ran off the *San Juan*, and set my men and myself, who were on board at the time, adrift in an open boat; but he was an older man," returned the American midshipman.

"Will you return with me in my yacht, and see if one I show you is *Don Diablo*, the corsair?" asked Isodoro.

"Willingly, señor."

The result the reader has seen, for with Isodoro Sabinas was Guy Stanhope, a handsome young midshipman of the United States navy, and acting as junior lieutenant of the *San Juan* at the time of her capture.

"That, Señor Sabinas, is not Captain Aubrey; but he is the man who captured the *San Juan*," had been Guy Stanhope's remark upon reaching the *azotea* and confronting the maiden and the man whose life she had saved.

Isodoro's eyes flashed with triumph, for he was ambitious to win a name for himself by the capture of the corsair, *Don Diablo*, and believed he had him wholly in his power.

But the bold deed of the man at bay stunned him, for all present saw that if they advanced on him the result would be the instant death of Nita Sabinas, and they started back in horror, while the young Cuban, white as a corpse, cried pleadingly:

"Go! you are free, only spare my poor sister."

"Go! and I will seek you on the high seas."

A bitter laugh, mingled with triumph, broke from the lips of the daring man, and he replied:

"Yes, I will go, my dear Señor Isodoro, and I thank you for the hospitality you have extended, and, if you wish to find me, you can look for me on blue water; but I warn you not to cross my path."

"Go!" commanded the Cuban, sternly.

The man did not change his attitude, still holding the blade in his hand, just above the heart of the unconscious Nita, and thus, for an instant, the appalling tableau lasted.

At length he broke the silence and the suspense with:

"I am not to be entrapped, *Don Isodoro*, so I carry your beautiful sister as a shield to my safety."

"Never! I will tear her from your grasp."

"Back! would you be her murderer?" sternly cried *Don Diablo*.

"Better that than what she may become."

"Oh no! she shall become my bride, if so she will; if not, she is free to remain in her home."

"She is not so fallen as to bind herself to an inhuman fiend such as you are, *Don Diablo*, the corsair."

"We shall see when she returns to consciousness; now I leave you, for yonder lies my lugger in the bay; but if you press me, Nita Sabinas dies."

"I swear it!"

He turned as he spoke, and raising the maiden in his uninjured arm, bore her toward the stone stairway leading down into the court.

Every step of the way Isodoro Sabinas, Guy Stanhope and the others slowly followed him, yet dared not press him, as the point of the blade rested upon the bosom of the maiden, and the hand that held the hilt all knew was merciless.

Crossing the flower-garden, he passed down an avenue to the sandy shore and then sprang into the stern-sheets of the boat in which *Don Isodoro* and his party had landed from the *goleta*.

As he was about to lay the maiden down to seize the oars, unable to stand it longer, to see his beloved sister thus torn from him, *Don Isodoro* cried earnestly:

"Come, let us rush upon him and tear her from his grasp!"

A few started, but all halted as they reached the water at the pirate's ringing words:

"Back! I say! Follow me, señors, and by High Heaven she dies!"

With a groan Isodoro Sabinas stood still, knee-deep in the waters, and, still shielding himself with the fair form from any pistol-shot, *Don Diablo*, with his right hand, seized an oar, thrust it into the stern rowlock, and sculled swiftly away from the shore.

Eagerly they watched him and saw him reach the side of the lugger and willing hands aid him and his fair burden on board.

CHAPTER V.

A COMPROMISE.

THE two-masted lugger which had entered the bay in the wake of the *goleta* of *Don Isodoro*, had dropped anchor close inshore, and remained perfectly quiet, as though her crew did not care to hold communication with the land.

To an ordinary observer she would appear like one of the numerous coffee droghers that ply along the Cuban coast, between the *pueblas* of the rich planters and the cities, Havana generally being their port of destination with merchandise, and the place where stores for the plantations are purchased.

But to the eye of a seaman she presented the appearance of a trim-looking craft, with hull and rig indicating speed and good sea-going qualities.

But half a dozen men were visible upon her decks, and one of these stood aft, and leisurely surveyed the shores.

The crew were a mixture of Indian, Spaniard and negro, and were evil-looking wretches, though they were without doubt thorough seamen.

The one who seemed the commander, from his air and dress, was evidently a Cuban.

He was of short stature, slender-formed, had small feet and hands, dressed in a certain dandified way, even though he wore only a blue jacket and white duck pants and tarpaulin.

His face was youthful, full of determination, not by any means homely, and wore the unmistakable stamp of refinement and intellect, in spite of his humble calling.

"Señor, there seems to be trouble ashore," said one of the Spanish sailors, approaching him.

"I have noticed it; but I have received no signal from the captain that he needs aid, and I guess he can take care of himself," was the nonchalant reply.

But the young commander of the lugger nevertheless kept his glass turned upon the villa, and closely watched the retreat of *Don Diablo*, carrying Nita Sabinas in his arms, while the others dogged his steps.

"See, Anton, the captain has taken care of himself, and there has been trouble," remarked the Cuban.

"Si, Señor Marial; *el capitán* brings a guest on board it seems," responded Anton, who acted as mate of the lugger.

Conrado Marial made no reply, but gazed more attentively at the scenes transpiring on shore, until presently he glanced at the lugger, somewhat anxiously, and said:

"Anton, we ran in too far; the tide is running out and we are on the bottom."

"It will be bad, if *el capitán* wishes to sail at once, Señor Marial."

"Yes, very bad; if he is in trouble, and I do not doubt it, there lies the *goleta* to run up the coast after the Spanish vessel-of-war we passed at anchor awhile since; she could get here be-

fore we float again; but see! the captain keeps the pack at bay," and Conrado Marial referred to the scene, then transpiring, where Don Isadoro had run into the water, as though to seize the boat in which Don Diablo was retreating.

"He could keep his namesake, El Diablo, at bay I believe," muttered Anton.

All on the lugger now narrowly watched the coming boat, which Don Diablo was rapidly sculling from the shore, and in a few moments the young Cuban drew Nita Sabinas on board, while he thought:

"*Madre de Dios!* what beauty!"

Aloud he said:

"Glad to welcome you, señor captain, and that your injuries are not now painful."

"Thank you, Conrado, I nearly went under, but thanks to this fair maiden I am almost myself again; but come into the cabin with me, for my sweet charge here is reviving, I see."

He descended into the cabin, a most comfortable one for a vessel of its kind, and saw that Nita Sabinas had opened her eyes and was gazing with wonder at him, and then at Conrado Marial.

"It is real then, and not a dream?" she murmured.

"Yes, Nita, it is no dream that I love you, and that you saved my life from the meditated attack of your brother and his friends; it is real that you are on board my own lugger, which, by letter, I ordered to join me here," he said, in his soft, fascinating way.

"I am here with you, you whom men call Don Diablo, the Rover," she muttered.

"Nita, hear me; men call me all that is bad, but the devil is not as black as he is painted, and I might be far worse."

"What I have been, matters not; but what I will be under your nobler, sweet influence, the future will show, for I love you devotedly, and am happy in the love you have given me."

"Yes, I love you, oh, so devotedly; only allow me to go back to my home, and when you have removed the stain from your name come for me, and I will go with you to the ends of the earth."

Don Diablo was about to make reply when, for the first time, he noticed the list of the lugger, and said quickly:

"You are aground, Conrado?"

"Yes, captain; we ran in too far, and the tide going out has grounded us."

Don Diablo's face grew dark, and he said quickly:

"I heard ashore just now that there was a Spanish vessel-of-war up the coast a couple of leagues."

"There is, señor; we passed her as we headed for the bay."

"Señor capitán, they are going on board the *goleta*," called out Anton, from the companion-way.

"Nita, pardon me one moment; come, Conrado, I would speak with you," and Don Diablo left the cabin, followed by the Cuban.

"Señor Marial, the lady I have here is the Señorita Nita Sabinas," he said, in an undertone.

"So I surmised, captain, from your words."

"After I captured that American cruiser, the San Juan, I sailed to Sisal to add to my crew, and was caught in a hurricane, and my vessel went to pieces on yonder rocky point, and I alone was saved, and through the bravery of the Señorita Sabinas."

"I wrote you to Havana of the loss of the schooner, and that we would have to still depend upon the lugger."

"I received your letter, captain, and came here according to your orders."

"You did right, and arrived just in time, for I was recognized by some accursed planter who had been my captive, and your coming as you did saved me; how many men have you?"

"Forty, captain."

"Good! and the lugger's guns?"

"Are in hold."

"Better still; were she not aground I would lay alongside yonder *goleta* and take her, for she is as fleet as a bird."

"True, señor; we chased her when we had your old schooner *El Cinto de Acero*,* and she outran us, fast as was the Belt."

"It is too bad that you ran into shallow water, and got left by the tide."

"I knew not the bay, captain, and had no pilot but the *goleta*, that came in ahead."

"You did well, Conrado; but we are caught, for the *goleta* will bring the Spanish war-vessel down upon us, and her commander will board us in spite of my threat to kill Señorita Sabinas."

"True, señor; but what is to be done?" asked Conrado Marial, with a puzzled air.

"I am like the lugger, Conrado, ashore," and Don Diablo smiled in spite of his danger.

Both men stood an instant in deep thought, and then the face of the young Cuban lighted up as he said:

"I have an idea, my captain, if you are willing to consent to it."

"When a man is in a desperate situation, he will agree to almost anything," was the significant reply.

"You are convinced of the love of the Señorita Sabinas for you?"

"I am."

"You have had proof of it?"

"She believes my word against all accusations regarding me."

"Are you willing to give her up?"

"No!"

"For the present?"

"Explain, Conrado."

"I propose a compromise."

"I am listening."

"The lugger is aground and we cannot leave."

"True."

"If we take to the shore we will be hunted down with bloodhounds."

"Yes."

"The *goleta* is getting under way to go after the Spaniard."

"Yes."

"The Spanish vessel will come in and take us."

"All this I know, good Conrado."

"Well, captain, I propose that you take the *goleta*."

"Ha! that would be a good idea," and the eyes of Don Diablo flashed with triumph, while he said:

"Call the crew up, and we will do it— No, no, for see, she is under sail, and our boats cannot overhaul her in this breeze."

With a muttered curse Don Diablo turned away, but Conrado Marial seemed impressed with another thought, or a determination to carry out his first plan, which he had not fully explained, for he suddenly hailed, in trumpet tones:

"Ho! the *goleta*!"

"Ahoy!" came back from the yacht.

"In Satan's name, Marial! what would you do?" sternly said the chief.

But, without heeding, the young officer called out:

"I have an offer to make from my captain; permit me to come on board."

"Again I ask what you intend, Señor Marial?" cried Don Diablo, angrily.

But before he could reply, Conrado Marial received his answer.

"Ay, ay, we will lay to for you to come on board; but come alone."

"I will do so, señor," answered the young Cuban, and then he turned to his chief, whose brow had become black with anger.

"Señor captain, pardon my assuming so much, but I did it for a purpose; you said you believed in the love of the Señorita Sabinas?"

"You heard what I said."

"Well, I will go on board the *goleta* and make a compromise."

"A compromise?"

"Yes, captain: I will offer to restore the señorita to her brother's care in return for the *goleta*."

"Ha! do you trifle with me, Marial?"

"No, señor captain; you know it is not my nature to trifle."

"What, then, do you mean?"

"Trusting in her love, you can trust her to go ashore and return to her home, and while I am gone make an arrangement with her for a rendezvous a week, or a month hence."

"Ha!"

"I see you understand."

"Yes, go on, señor."

"If she fails to keep that appointment, it is easy enough to get her again in your power, for I am certain my captain will not be content to command only this lugger and a few men when there are better craft to capture."

"Conrado Marial, you are a true friend, and I will do as you say; go on board the *goleta* and make what terms you can."

CHAPTER VI.

CONRADO MARIAL'S MISSION.

WHILE Don Diablo entered the cabin of the lugger, which now lay over on her beam-ends, the tide having left her thus, Conrado Marial sprang into the *goleta's* boat, which his chief had come out in, and her crew shoving it into the water, he sculled rapidly out to the yacht.

All on board watched his coming closely, and endeavored to get a view of his face; but the young Cuban bent his head and drew his hat down over his eyes, until he ascended the side of the *goleta*.

"Well, sir, do you come from that accursed sea devil to offer terms?" asked Don Isadoro, sternly.

"I came from my captain, señor, and would see you in private," was the quiet response of Conrado, who still concealed his face as much as was in his power.

"Then follow me to my cabin," was the stern response of Isadoro Sabinas, and the next moment Conrado stood in the luxuriously-furnished cabin of the *goleta*, for, with ample means at his command, and devoted to a sea life, Don Isadoro had fitted his fleet and beautiful vessel up in princely style.

"Now, señor, if you are not afraid to look an honest man in the face, raise your hang-dog head and tell me what terms your master, the devil, offers to treat with me on?" and Don Isadoro fixed his piercing eyes upon his visitor.

Conrado Marial started at his words, and his dark face flushed as he raised his eyes full to those of the man before him, and said sternly:

"Isadoro Sabinas, I fear to look no man in the eye."

"*Madre de Dios!* Estevan El Saltador, do my eyes deceive me?" and Don Isadoro started back in an attitude of amazement, and half-drawing a pistol from his belt.

"No, Don Isadoro, your eyes do not deceive you; I am Estevan, the Buccaneer, or, as I am known since my escape from the *garote* the day I took that fearful leap for life, Estevan, El Saltador."*

"They said he had been captured and hanged at the yard-arm of an American cruiser," said Don Isadoro, speaking to himself, as though thinking aloud.

"They said wrong, as you see, Don Isadoro, for I am still afloat, and wear the brand of piracy complacently on my brow."

"Banished and hunted down, because my father was a conspirator against Spain; with my home in ruins, my fortune wrested from me, I had but one course to pursue, and that was to ally myself with outlaws."

"You, in one of your pleasure cruises, found my vessel a wreck upon the waters, driven before a hurricane, and you it was who carried me into Havana, where I was condemned to death."

"But did not die, as you made a leap for life from the cliff into the sea that paralyzed all who saw it."

"You justly earned the name of The Leaper, Estevan, as your father did that of The Traitor before you."

"We will not discuss my father, Don Isadoro, but turn to the cause of my coming here and voluntarily placing myself in your power," said the Cuban, sternly.

"And now that you are here I hold you my prisoner," and Don Isadoro drew his pistol quickly and covered the heart of the young outlaw with the muzzle.

But Conrado Marial did not move, or show the slightest sign of fear, as he said:

"You forget, Don Isadoro, that your sister would be held as a hostage against my return."

"Ha! I did forget that; but that accursed fiend has her in his power now, and will not give her up."

"I have come to offer a compromise."

"Name it."

"You were standing out to sea when I hailed?"

"Yes, to the Spanish vessel you doubtless saw at anchor as you came into the bay."

"Yes, señor, I saw her."

"Her commander would be glad to have you a prisoner, Don Estevan," said Isadoro, with a sneer.

"Doubtless, and you, too, rich as you are, for there is a price of twenty thousand pesos on my head."

"Yes, and as much on the head of Don Diablo; I would make a handsome sum by the capture of such a precious pair."

"Why do you hesitate, Don Isadoro, to get the rewards?"

"You know that my sister is in your power."

"Yes, señor, and her dead body would be sent to you if harm befell me, or the Spaniard came in and attacked the lugger."

"Good God! I believe your chief to be capable of any crime; but I have on board here a Spanish Government officer, and he demands that I sail to the cruiser and make known the presence of the lugger and who is her chief."

"Well, Don Isadoro, if you desire to save your beautiful sister, I beg that you agree to my terms."

"Name them, I say."

"Our lugger is ashore."

"So I see; you got caught in your own trap."

"We are not caught yet."

"You certainly are."

"We shall see, my dear Don."

"But your terms, or those of Don Diablo, for I care not with whom I deal, so I save my sister."

"Having observed that the lugger is on the bottom, and cannot sail for some hours, you know that we cannot put to sea."

"That is evident."

"Well, we must put to sea, or get taken by the Spanish cruiser, and not being able to go in the lugger, I have come to ask you for your pretty vessel."

"In the devil's name! what mean you?"

"This vessel's hull was once my own craft, I believe?"

"Yes, she was a wreck, as you know, when I towed her into Havana, and I had her rebuilt and refitted, on account of her beauty and speed."

"And honored me by naming her after me?"

"True; she leaps over the waters so, I called her *El Saltador*."

"Then I think I have a claim upon her, and offer to buy her."

"She is not for sale."

"I must have her."

* The Steel Belt.—THE AUTHOR.

* The Leaper.—THE AUTHOR.

"I will not give her up."

"Then your sister is doomed."

The stern reply caused Don Isodoro to turn pale, and he gasped forth:

"What do you, can you mean?"

"I will give you your sister safe in your hands, for this vessel."

Don Isodoro Sabinas saw now that he was the one that was entrapped, and he paced to and fro in the cabin with quick step and angry brow.

Silently El Saltador watched him for a moment, and then said:

"Don Isodoro, you need not be told how necessary it is for my chief and myself to put to sea."

"The lugger is aground and we cannot go in her, and from some source, as many ashore know what is going on here, news of our presence will be carried to the Spanish vessel, and we will be taken."

"Your sister I will give up to you for this vessel intact, excepting her slave crew and your personal baggage, and I give you two minutes to decide whether to refuse or accept my terms."

"And if I refuse?"

"My chief will lash your sister to the lugger's mast, set the craft on fire, and take this *goleta* in our boats, for we have half a hundred men on yonder vessel."

The words and manner of Estevan the Leaper struck Don Isodoro dumb with horror and terror, and he could but gaze upon the daring man in silence.

"One minute has gone, señor," and the Leaper looked at a gold watch, while he added slowly:

"You know the character of the man whom they call Don Diablo, so I beg you, for the sake of your lovely sister, do not hesitate."

"No, no, I will not hesitate; the *goleta* is yours if you but give me my sister in honor and safety," cried the young Cuban, in trembling tones:

"A wise decision, señor; now land your guests and crew on the nearest point, and I will send the Donna Sabinas ashore."

"Now I will return and report to my captain."

He left the cabin without another word, and slowly Don Isodoro followed him, looking like a man who had been struck some severe blow.

As Estevan sprang into his boat and skulled away, Don Isodoro commanded in loud tones, addressing the young Cuban who acted as first officer of the yacht:

"Señor Lazaro, drop anchor, and land the entire crew on yonder point, for I give up the *goleta*."

Even the score of negroes, the slave crew of the yacht, gazed in astonishment at this strange command, while Guy Stanhope, the American midshipman, asked quickly:

"Why, Señor Sabinas, why this strange order?"

"Yes, Don Isodoro, are you in earnest?" asked the Spanish officer, who had accompanied the young Cuban from Havana, and who was an aide on the staff of the Governor-General.

"Yes, Señor Stanhope, and Major Enrique Alvarado, I am in earnest; I have sold the *goleta*," he said, bitterly.

"Sold El Saltador?" cried Major Alvarado.

"Yes, sold her to her former owner, who was just on board, and who is none other than Estevan El Saltador."

"What! Don Isodoro have you done this?" cried the Spaniard.

"I have, and for a good price."

"I had no idea that the love of gold could tempt Don Isodoro Sabinas to sell a vessel to a conspirator against his king, the son of a traitor, and himself a pirate."

"Major Enrique Alvarado, I forgive your words under the circumstances, for had I sold my vessel for gold to a pirate, I would deserve their sting."

"But the price I got for the *goleta* was my sister."

Both the American and the Spaniard gave a sigh of relief, and Don Isodoro explained what had occurred in the cabin, and, knowing the character of Don Diablo, they could not blame him, and preparations were made to leave the *goleta*.

Ten minutes after the beautiful vessel lay at anchor crewless, and a boat from the lugger carried Don Diablo and Nita Sabinas to the shore, and landed within a short distance of Don Isodoro and his party.

"Remember, my sweet Nita, one week hence I will be on the coast in a small lugger, and you know my signal, so be ready," said Don Diablo, in a low tone, as he touched the shore.

"I will be ready; and you will prove to me that you are not all they say of you?" she answered, hopefully.

"Yes; adios, my beautiful Nita."

He aided her out upon the sands, and springing back in his boat sculled rapidly directly toward the *goleta*, where the lugger's boats had already carried his crew, whose appearance proved to Don Isodoro that Estevan El Saltador had not spoken falsely when he said he had force enough to carry the yacht by boarding.

"Señor captain, the Señor Marial did not come off with us," said Anton, as the lugger's crew reached the *goleta*.

"True, Anton; he remained on board the lugger to give those who take her in charge a little surprise to-night; you act in his place, and get the *goleta* at once under all the sail she will carry," replied Don Diablo.

Five minutes more and El Saltador was flying seaward with a pirate crew upon her decks, and the daring Don Diablo at her helm, for, during his convalescence at the villa of Don Sabinas, he had learned the channel out of the bay, while sailing of an afternoon with the beautiful maiden whose love he had won.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CORSAIR'S RETURN.

JUAN LAZARO, the sailing-master of the lost El Saltador, so cleverly captured from Don Isodoro, sat alone in the cabin of the lugger left by Don Diablo.

The tide had come in and the graceful vessel was riding the waves, which a six-knot breeze was sending shoreward to break upon the sandy beach.

The greater part of the *goleta's* crew had been sent to the negro-quarters, their services not being needed, and but four of the black sailors remained upon the lugger, and were forward singing African melodies, and enjoying the moonlit scene of bay, sea and shore, for there is ever a love of nature in the breast of the negro.

In the cabin, though it was far from being the luxurious quarters of the *goleta*, Juan Lazaro was not at all miserable, for he had been on a voyage of discovery and found some choice wines and edibles, which showed that the former commander of the vessel had not been in want of the luxuries of life.

Discussing his second bottle of Amontillado, he did not observe, what appeared to be the partition of a state-room, slowly turning, as though on a pivot, and disclosing a narrow space some eighteen inches wide and ten feet long.

It was but a false wall, or partition, ingeniously arranged so as to deceive any one; but it contained a great deal of mischief, for seven men stood in line in the narrow space, and the lamp in the cabin showed that they were a desperate-looking set, and all well armed.

At the head of the line was Conrado Estevan, or El Saltador, as he was known to Cubans, and, as the false wall noiselessly swung open, he stepped quietly forth, and a pistol-muzzle was thrust in the face of Juan Lazaro, and the low, stern words fell on his ear:

"Move, or cry out, señor, and you die."

"Nombre de Dios! who are you?" gasped Lazaro, in a hoarse whisper.

"El Saltador," was the calm reply.

"Ha! and what want you here?" asked Lazaro, in the same whisper, for he dared not raise his voice.

"I am at home, here, señor, this being my lugger, which, not caring to have fall into other hands, I remained to take charge of; see, here are my crew," and he beckoned to his six comrades, who passed before the gaze of the terror-stricken man, having stepped out of their hiding-place and closed the wall as it was before.

"Holy Virgin protect me," gasped Juan Lazaro, believing that he was to be killed.

"I do not intend to harm you, señor, if you do my bidding."

"Oh, I will do anything, everything, señor, if you do not kill me," cried the frightened man.

"If I killed you, you could do nothing."

"I am not fit to die, señor."

"I can believe that; but now obey me."

"In everything, good señor."

"Step to the companionway, and call one of your crew."

Juan Lazaro obeyed, calling, in a loud tone:

"Pedro!"

"Si, señor," answered the slave called, and he entered the cabin to be immediately seized and bound, while a knife at his throat prevented any outcry.

In this way the rest of the crew were safely captured, and then, leaving the lugger in the charge of one of his men, Conrado Estevan sprang into a boat and pulled ashore.

As though thoroughly acquainted with the surroundings of the villa, he made his way through the grounds, and approached the wing in which were the rooms of Nita Sabinas.

There was a light streaming from the long windows, and he heard voices within, and knew that the young girl and her maid were conversing together.

Making a hasty tour of the villa, he discovered that Don Isodoro and his guests were in the parlor playing cards, and returning beneath the window of Nita Sabinas's room, he hastily wrote something on a piece of paper, the moonlight guiding him, and wrapping it around a bullet he took from his pocket, threw it into the room.

He heard it fall upon the floor, and the startled cries that were uttered both by Nita and Alena, her octoroon maid, and knew that what he had written would meet the eye of her for whom it was intended.

Then he walked rapidly back to the shore,

sprung into his boat and rowed back to the lugger.

"Now, señor, when you have run the lugger out of the bay for me, you can go ashore with your crew, and say to Don Isodoro Sabinas that El Saltador bids him keep a close watch on the Señorita Sabinas, for she is in danger; now take the helm, please, and, remember, if the lugger strikes in going out, it will be the signal for your death."

Juan Lazaro took the helm, the huge lateen sails were spread, and the fleet craft went seaward with a merry ripple under her bows.

Once out of the bay, and Juan Lazaro and the four slaves were put in a boat and set adrift, to return to their home, while the lugger stood away in the direction of the Isle of Pines.

The day after sailing a small craft was sighted, standing close inshore, and a signal was flying, which Conrado seemed to recognize, for he squared away directly for the little vessel.

As the two vessels drew near together the tall form of Don Diablo was visible upon the deck of the little lugger, and he called out:

"Well done, Conrado, in so cleverly retaking the lugger; now head inshore and drop anchor in the Red Lagoon, and I will join you there as soon as I accomplish my object."

"You go to the Villa del Florida, señor captain?" asked Conrado.

"Yes, and will return as soon as I can; adios."

The two vessels parted, the large lugger under command of Conrado Estevan heading straight inshore, and soon disappearing in the mouth of some inlet or lagoon, and the smaller craft standing down the coast in the direction of the Villa del Florida.

With the one purpose in his mind, of recovering possession of Nita Sabinas, and to accomplish which he had captured a fishing *polacca*, and sent the *goleta* on to the rendezvous, Don Diablo, disguised as a common seaman, held on down the coast, until the white walls of the Sabinas villa arose before his view.

As the little vessel was gliding rapidly along, close inshore, driven by a hard wind that was blowing, and the daring man at her helm was plotting how he was to get possession of the fair Nita, he suddenly saw a cavalcade dashing swiftly along the highway, and with a start recognized the beautiful form of Señorita Sabinas on horseback.

She was attended by the American midshipman, Guy Stanhope, and behind her came two other couples, whom Don Diablo saw were Isodoro Sabinas and Major Enrique Alvarado, escorting ladies from some of the neighboring *pueblas*.

At a glance Nita Sabinas also recognized her lover, and, acting under the sudden impulse of her most impulsive nature, she suddenly turned her horse and dashed away like the wind, riding toward a low point of land, to which she pointed with her whip.

Realizing her intention intuitively, Don Diablo headed directly toward the shore, at the point where he expected her to reach it, and called to the half-dozen men he had on board to be ready for busy action.

Astounded at the inexplicable conduct of his beautiful young hostess, Guy Stanhope drew rein for an instant, scarcely knowing what to do, until startled by the ringing tones of Don Isodoro, whose quick eye had also recognized the chief.

"Quick! follow me, for yonder boat carries Don Diablo, and she flies to his protection!"

Like the wind Don Isodoro started in pursuit, and, deserting the two ladies, the three horsemen were at once in full chase of the fair fugitive.

But holding her way directly for the sandy beach, Nita Sabinas seemed determined to fly from the protection of home and kindred for the love of an outlaw, and urged her splendid horse at once into the foaming surf, for the sea was running high.

Boldly the obedient animal breasted the waves, and when Don Isodoro and the others reached the shore she had left, Nita Sabinas was far out upon the wind-lashed waters, and the little lugger standing in a direction to head her off.

Having relinquished the helm to one of his men, Don Diablo stood on the deck, a coiled rope in his hand, to throw over the daring girl as the lugger shot by, and, as he neared the now terribly frightened, but nobly struggling horse, he shouted in triumphant and cheery tones:

"Bravo! my noble Nita, you are mine once more!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A PLOT FOILED.

It was a critical moment, and formed a thrilling tableau, if the moving objects and persons of the scene may be so designated, at the moment when Don Diablo cried with exultation:

"Bravo! my noble Nita, you are mine once more."

The sea was running high, half a gale was blowing and pressing the little lugger over until her lee scuppers were under water, the chief stood with rope in hand ready to cast to the

brave girl, whose terrified horse was plunging fearfully in the rough waters, while on land, their horses checked at the verge of the surf, was Don Isodoro and his party, and to all the wooded shores and hills formed a wild background to the thrilling picture.

Answering the words of Don Diablo with a wave of her hand and a smile, though she was very pale, yet full of nerve and iron resolve, Nita Sabinas caught the rope thrown her, passed it around her waist, and turning her horse's head shoreward slipped from the saddle.

Almost instantly she was drawn on board the lugger, and was in the arms of Don Diablo, while the little vessel dashed on, leaving the surprised and frightened horse swimming shoreward.

"Oh! I hope he will not drown, for I owe to him my escape," cried Nita, her first thought for her horse, and turning she gazed anxiously upon the bravely-struggling animal, which, seemingly realizing that he had well done his work, was determined to save himself.

Interested also in the beast, Don Diablo and his crew watched his course, while Don Isodoro and his friends rode rapidly to the point where he would land, and the Cuban seized his bridle as he came out of the water.

"Thank God he did not die," cried Nita, fervently, and then, no longer dreading for the animal, she thought of herself, and said quickly:

"I expected you to-night, Austin; but my brother had arranged a plot to entrap me, and recognizing you at the lugger's helm, I impulsively decided to escape."

"Your brother had arranged to entrap you, Nita?" asked Don Diablo, in surprise.

"Yes, above here two leagues lies a Spanish schooner of war, and her commander is my brother's friend."

"Feeling assured, after the clever capture of the lugger by El Saltador—"

"El Saltador! what mean you, Nita?" said the astonished chief.

"Why, did you not leave Estevan El Saltador to retake your lugger?"

"By no means; I left the man who proposed the compromise by which I got your brother's *goleta*."

"That was Estevan, the Leaper."

"Impossible; it was my lieutenant, and a dashing, daring fellow, too. His name is Conrado Marial."

"Yes, he is the same; Conrado Marial Estevan was his name, and he is the son of the conspirator, and is himself the one upon whom a price is set, and bears the name of El Saltador."

"Why, I knew him well, for he was my brother's friend years ago."

"By Heaven! but this is news to me."

"The man served me well once in Havana, when I was recognized in a *café* and followed, and took me on board his lugger."

"I suspected him of being an outlaw and a pirate, or smuggler, and he became a member of a League that I know of, and to him I wrote when I was at your villa to come after me."

"Well, so my lieutenant is the famous El Saltador, is he?"

It was evident that Don Diablo had temporarily forgotten himself, for his words caused Nita to gaze fixedly upon him, and ask reproachfully:

"Your lieutenant, and you supposed him to be a pirate?"

"We have to employ any means, sweet Nita, to carry out our purposes," was the prompt answer, and without embarrassment, and he continued, as the shadow partially left her face:

"We will soon see this famous El Saltador, for he awaits us with his lugger, some leagues from here in the Red Lagoon."

"Then hasten there, Austin, for this little craft is not one to escape from a foe in, and my brother you see has already ridden hastily in the direction of the anchorage of the Spanish schooner, and Major Alvarado you see accompanies him, while the American officer remains to escort the Señoritas Vilno to their hacienda," and Nita pointed shoreward, where Don Isodoro and Major Alvarado were visible, riding rapidly down the coast, while Guy Stanhope and the two Cuban maidens had turned off on a road leading into the interior of the island.

"Do you know just where this schooner is, at anchor, Nita?" asked Don Diablo, calmly.

"Yes, in Island Inlet, beyond the entrance to our bay."

"I know it; they have two miles to reach there, and the schooner has three leagues to sail to reach this point, which, with delay of getting under way, will give us about six leagues' start, which is enough on this boat with the half-gale now blowing."

"Once on board the lugger and the schooner need as well give up the chase; keep her steady, Pablo, and head straight for the Red Lagoon," he ordered the man at the helm, and again turning to Nita he continued:

"But the surprise of discovering I had El Saltador with me, prevented my asking how your brother had intended entrapping you?"

"He feared your return, and seeing that I loved you with my whole heart, and good or bad, did not intend to give you up, it was his intention to get me on board the schooner and

then carry me to Havana, where my father now is, and then it would be decided what was best to be done with me."

"And they have failed, for I have you now with me, thanks to your love and daring; but, Nita, how learned you this?"

"Through Alena, my octoroon maid; my brother, as he believed, bought her over by making up a paper giving her her freedom, and she learned all his plan, and secretly, as he believed, got my baggage together."

"Fearing that I would not go on board the vessel, my brother arranged a horseback ride, and by accident we were to come upon the schooner and be invited on board; but I had made up my mind to seemingly acquiesce and to escape in Havana and find you."

"Bless you, my noble girl; and you have found me, and within a few hours the holy padre of the hamlet near the Red Lagoon shall make you my wife; but see, there is a party moving along on shore."

The maiden glanced an instant at what had caught the quick eye of the chief, and cried, exultantly:

"It is the vehicle carrying Alena and my baggage."

"Now, Austin, I will not come to you a beggarly bride."

"I will put inshore and get your baggage and your maid, sweet Nita; Pablo, run in to yonder point, for it is still water there."

The lugger luffed up within a short distance of the shore, just as the ox-drawn vehicle passed along the highway that ran only a few paces from the sea.

Upon the luggage piled high in the wagon sat Alena, the octoroon, and her face gleamed with delight at beholding her mistress.

The transfer to the lugger was quickly made, the slave driver of the team ordered back to the villa, and once more the little vessel headed along the coast in the direction of the Red Lagoon.

As she gained an offing Don Diablo glanced astern and said, calmly:

"There comes the schooner in chase."

"Pablo, we must make this craft fly, for it has a rich freight on board not intended for Spanish booty."

CHAPTER IX.

A MUTINEER'S FATE.

As the lugger sped along under full sail, though the wind was increasing in violence every moment and the sea was very rough, Don Diablo took the helm of the little craft, and by his side Nita Sabinas took a seat and watched him.

She recalled, as she glanced backward and beheld the Spanish schooner coming rapidly on, that the life of the man she loved was in deadly peril, and she remembered how he had saved that life in his escape from the villa, by swearing to sacrifice her.

But, as she gazed on his face, wholly indifferent to the danger that threatened him, if the pursuing vessel overtook him, her admiration for the man rose the higher, and she loved him the more.

True, he was more than double her years, yet he did not look it.

Could a man so hardened by crime as must be Don Diablo, still wear the handsome, fascinating face that he did who had professed to love her?

Such was her question, and she answered it herself.

The truth was, Nita Sabinas had become fascinated with the man, and he held her wholly at his mercy.

She had saved him the day of the wreck, she had nursed him in his suffering, and she had drank deep of the intoxicating cup of love, and cared not if she would find dregs in the bottom.

She had listened to his low, musical voice in telling her stories of strange lands; she had been held spellbound by his voice in song, and charmed by his master touch upon her harp and guitar, while he had proven himself an artist of no mean worth, and, in fact, had brought her under his influence as the snake does the bird.

That he was other than he had represented himself she feared; but yet she loved him, and she would cling to him, come what might, and be his crimes upon others as black as midnight.

That he thus held a charm upon her which she could not shake off, Don Diablo well knew, and he loved her as he had never loved but one woman before; one woman who had proven false to him when he was a mere youth, and had made him, by that act, the guilty man he had become, for, driven to madness by jealous fury, he had taken her life and the life of his rival, and fled to the sea for refuge from his crime.

Since then he had hated womankind, and had delighted to bring misery upon them; but with Nita Sabinas it was different, for she had saved his life, and hearing the basest accusations against him, still loved him, and he swore that he would never desert her.

Such were the thoughts that were flitting through the brain of Don Diablo, and the young and trusting girl at his side, as the little lugger

bounded along, her heavy pressure of canvas threatening to drive her under the waves.

But the chief was a skilled seaman, and often rescued the lugger from destruction by a sudden movement of the tiller, when the crew thought it would be impossible to have her recover from the incline upon which sudden gusts of fierce wind would force her.

"Had we better reef, señor captain?" asked Pablo, really alarmed for the lugger.

"Pablo, do you not know me better than to suggest what I shall do on my own vessel?" said Don Diablo, in his calm, but threatening way.

"But, señor, you are making us all take fearful chances for life," persisted the Spaniard, as the lugger gave another swoop to leeward, but was rescued most skillfully.

"Pablo, go forward!" was the stern command.

"The men are with me, señor, in thinking the risk you make us take is terrible."

"Then for you, my dear Pablo, there shall be no risk; it shall be a certainty."

With the last word of Don Diablo he threw his pistol forward, which he had hastily drawn from his belt, and with the flash the Spaniard fell to the deck, and a lurch of the lugger carried him off on the wild waters.

With a stifled cry, Nita Sabinas hid her face in her hands to shut out the scene, for the wildly frightened eyes, from which life had not yet fled, were turned upon her, as if to implore mercy, and the hands grasped convulsively at the crests of foam.

"That seemed cruel, my dear Nita, but it stopped an incipient mutiny in the bud," said Don Diablo, in his cool way, addressing the maiden, but with his gaze fixed upon the crew forward, all of whom had sprung to their feet at his act, but quickly crouched down again at catching his burning eyes fixed upon them.

"Oh! it was cruel! how could you do such a deed?" cried Nita, tearfully.

"Nita, I do not know all these men, for they are not of my old crew, and knowing that there is a price on my head, and a rich one, too, and expecting a large reward from your father for restoring you, they would willingly give me up to yonder pursuing vessel."

She seemed not to hear his last words, but only to dwell on the first:

"Knowing that there is a price on my head."

She looked him now fairly in the face and said earnestly, yet in a low tone:

"There is a price on your head then?"

"Yes."

"You have deceived me then?"

"Yes."

"You are not Captain Austin Aubrey?"

"No."

"Not an American?"

"Yes, but I acknowledge no land as my own."

"Oh, Heaven have mercy!"

"The sea is my home, Nita."

"And your flag?"

"I will describe them to you, Nita."

"Them?"

"Yes, for I carry two."

"Two?"

"Yes, one at the peak, another at the fore."

"I will listen."

"At the peak I fly a flag of sable hue, with a red arm and hand upholding a white skull."

He paused, but she made no reply, and her face was bowed upon her knees.

Then he continued:

"At the fore I carry a flag with a green field, representing the sea, and flying over the waters is the form of an old hag, or Gipsy, in black."

"Mother of God, have mercy! you give the well-known emblem of the Sea Gipsy Corsair, the vessel of—" she paused, as if oppressed with horror, and he said in his quiet way:

"Of Don Diablo."

"His vessel, the Sea Gipsy, was sunk by an American cruiser off the north coast?"

"Yes."

"And you are—"

"Don Diablo men call me, Nita."

The very softness of his tone kept her from crying out in horror, and she remained silent, and no word was spoken for some time.

Then she said plaintively:

"Oh, how could you deceive me thus?"

"Because I loved you, Nita, and loving you would not give you up, be I what I may," was the answer, and he laid one hand softly upon her shoulder.

"But, as though stung by an adder, she sprung to her feet, crying angrily and with flashing eyes:

"Back! do not touch me, for I hate you, Don Diablo, the Pirate."

CHAPTER X.

LOVE AND HATE.

HARDLY had the stinging words left the lips of Nita Sabinas, when there was heard a ringing shout forward, and the half-dozen men who formed the lugger's crew came running aft in a body.

"Down with him, and sell his head, lads!" shouted the leader.

"Take him alive! he's worth more," yelled another.

"The gal sides with us," cried a third.

It was certainly a critical moment for Don Diablo.

The sea was running very high, and the lugger was rushing through it at a speed that threatened to send her to the bottom, pressed as she was with all her canvas.

Her decks were fairly drowned with water, the wind and waves were momentarily increasing, and astern, two leagues away, came the schooner in chase, and also under clouds of canvas.

His hand was upon the tiller of the lugger, and alone guided it through the wild sea.

His crew was rushing upon him with cutlasses and pistols, and he was one to six in the struggle for life.

Upon the windward side of the lugger, clinging to the ratlines, stood Nita Sabinas, her face white, her lips stern, and her eyes turned with reproach, indignation and sorrow commingled, upon Don Diablo.

And the chief?

Stood at the helm, calm, resolute, and yet with a glare in his dark eyes that was baleful, and fearful to look upon.

On rushed the crew of the lugger, the golden reward they hoped to get, causing them to forget the danger of the sea, should the lugger be left to itself.

"Back, devils!"

The cry broke in roaring, thundering accents from the lips of Don Diablo, and his right hand held a pistol, while his left still firmly grasped the tiller.

"No, Don Diablo, we will have you dead or alive," shouted one of the mutineers, and he sprung upon the chief.

But there was a flash and report and the man fell dead in the cockpit.

What followed was the work of an instant, for, compelled to release his hold upon the helm, the lugger swept up into the wind with terrific force, and tons of water fell upon her deck, carrying one of the mutineers off to his death.

But the others, shouting to each other to take the chief alive, threw themselves upon him with their cutlasses, and a fierce combat was begun.

A splendid swordsman, Don Diablo, who had hastily drawn his blade, parried their attack, and under other circumstances, where he had a firm footing, might have kept his adversaries at bay.

But standing below them in the cockpit, with the lugger riding wildly, and pressed hard by men who also knew how to use a sword, they got under his guard and he was in their grasp.

No, not in the grasp of the four, for one lay dead beneath his feet, and another hung back, blinded by a blow across the face.

Powerful as he was, Don Diablo felt that he was in the power of his assailants, for a blow on the head had greatly weakened and half-stunned him, and he felt that all was lost.

But no, there suddenly came a sharp report, and one of his adversaries let go his gripe of his throat, staggered back, grasped hold of his wounded comrade, and a lurch of the lugger, which shipped a huge wave on her deck, sent them both to a watery grave.

At the same moment another shot was fired, and Don Diablo's last foe went down in a heap.

But on him fell the tall form of the chief, just as Nita Sabinas sprung forward, and threw herself down by his side.

"No, no, he is not dead! he shall not die, but live for me, for in spite of his crimes I love him."

Such was her cry, and she placed her hand over his heart as she spoke.

"He is merely unconscious; stunned by the last blow I saw dealt him; but he shall not die."

She glanced quickly over the sea as she spoke, and saw that the Spanish schooner was creeping upon them.

Instantly, a thorough sailor, from her living on the water and being taught by her brother in early childhood, she got the lugger again under way, and exerting all her strength, held her on her course, while at her feet lay the prostrate form of Don Diablo and the mutineer sailor.

Away flew the vessel once more, and Nita Sabinas muttered sternly:

"Better that I run this craft beneath the waters than live to see him garroted as a pirate."

CHAPTER XI.

SAIL, HO!

In the rough waters that the little lugger had to struggle through, the Spanish schooner steadily gained upon her, until the six miles of an hour before were diminished to five.

At her feet still lay the form of the man she had told she hated, and yet loved to such a degree of intensity that she had come to his aid in his hopeless struggle, and taken life to save him.

Presently a dash of spray in his upturned face aroused him somewhat, and, after awhile his eyes slowly opened.

But they seemed dimmed, and were fixed upon no object, roving listlessly.

"Great God! can the blow have crazed his brain?" she cried, in tones of commingled anguish and terror.

He heard her voice, and, with a seeming effort turned his gaze upon her.

She smiled and spoke to him in a low, soothing, loving tone, for she dared not leave the helm to approach him.

He lay quiet for an instant, seemingly soothed by her tones, for his eyelids again closed over the bedimmed orbs.

"Oh, will he die, after all? must I lose him forever?"

"Or will he go mad?" were the questions that sprung to her lips.

Again the eyes opened, and much of the dimness was gone, and he smiled faintly, while he passed his hand across his brow slowly.

She watched him anxiously, and heard his softly-spoken words:

"You hate me then, Nita?"

"No, no, I do not hate you; I love you with all my heart."

"Only live and I shall be happy," she answered, fervently.

"I shall not die, sweet one, though you were the kind angel that saved me just now."

He arose to his feet, glanced astern, and then down upon the body of the dead seaman.

Without a word he bent over and raising it in his arms cast it into the sea, while in spite of herself Nita Sabinas shuddered at the perfect indifference he showed at death.

"We are now captain and crew, Nita, and we must do all we can to escape from yonder Spaniard."

"He is gaining fast," replied the maiden, glancing astern.

"Yes, his large hull helps him in this rough sea; but he shall not take us," he answered, firmly.

"What would you do, Aus— No, no, I cannot call you by that name, for it is not your own," she said, excitedly.

"Call me by my own name then, sweet Nita."

"I know it not."

"It has not been breathed by my lips for long years, and all who know me believe me to be a Mexican; but I am an American, and long ago, when I knew no crime, when I was as innocent of wrong-doing as you are, my name was Nevil Vane, and I was the last of my race."

"Nevil Vane; what a pretty name! oh, that you had never been forced to change it for—"

"Reno Quesala, the Mexican Corsair, or Don Diablo, the Red Rover," he said, bitterly.

"I will call you Nevil," she remarked, quickly, as though to change the current of his thoughts, and seeing that the schooner was more rapidly gaining as the waves ran higher, she added: "But what are we to do to escape from yonder vessel?"

"I am within a league of the shore, as you see, and will head for it and beach the lugger; once in the forest we can defy pursuit, for we can seek some hacienda, get horses and go on to the Red Lagoon, if you cannot walk."

"How far is it from here?"

"Three leagues."

"Then hold on as long as you can; but in the mean time I will go into the cabin and prepare what things I can take with me and rouse poor Alena, who seems stupefied with terror."

Descending into the cabin of the lugger Nita found her octoroon maid crouching down in the midst of the pile of baggage, wailing and weeping in an agony of terror and misery, for Alena was no sailor, and what with seasickness and fright at the struggle on deck, and the belief that they were in the hands of pirates, she was nearly beside herself.

But Nita quieted her fears and bade her come on deck and get some fresh air, as a panacea for her seasickness, and, with the light-heartedness of her nature, Alena was soon herself once more.

With calm face, and watching every motion of his vessel and his pursuers, Don Diablo held on his way until less than a league divided the schooner and the lugger.

Then, seeing that to hold on along the coast would result in the overhauling of the lugger before two hours more, his keen eyes glanced along the wooded shores for a good place to run in and make a landing, and he said, quietly:

"Make a package of such things as you need, Nita, and Alena can carry them, while I will care for you."

"You intend to run ashore then, Nevil?" she asked.

"Yes, it is our only chance to escape, for the schooner is coming rapidly after us— Ha! by the saints! we are saved!"

His cry turned the eyes of both Nita and the octoroon in the direction of his gaze, and they beheld a large vessel standing out from the land and having come, apparently, out of the very forest, for no inlet was visible.

"It is the lugger of El Salvador, Nita; he has seen our flight, and is coming to our aid."

"But can he reach us ere the schooner does?"

"Yes, for yonder craft can almost fly."

"But the schooner may fire upon a larger vessel than this one."

"Let them do so; Conrado can answer back."

"But the lugger that anchored in the bay was unarmed."

"Her guns were in the hold; take my glass and you will see iron bull-dogs chained at each port, now," cried Don Diablo, exultantly, and even then the little lugger seemed to bound more swiftly forward at sight of the vessel coming to her aid.

CHAPTER XII.

WALKING THE PLANK.

THAT those on the Spanish schooner recognized the large lugger, that had so suddenly stood out from the shore to the aid of Don Diablo, was evident from the excitement on board, for, in spite of the fierce wind that was blowing, reefs were shaken out of the sails, and her course was so changed as to get into a position that would have the two vessels between the Spaniard and the land.

Unmindful of this maneuver, and, in fact, not apparently minding the presence of the cruiser, Conrado Estevan signaled to Don Diablo to run further inshore to get into the lee of the land, where the waters were not so rough, and the two luggers were at once sailing for a given point, the wind on the starboard of one and the larboard of the other.

Discovering their intention, the Spanish commander at once opened fire upon the larger lugger, hoping to cripple her, but, seeing that the two would be alongside of each other within a few moments more, he was urged by Don Isadoro to fire upon the little craft.

"But, your sister?" said the young Spaniard, with surprise.

"Better be killed by your fire, than become what that devil will make her," was the stern response.

"You mean it, Don Isadoro, that I shall fire on the little lugger?"

"I do; it is the only hope to save her, and death will be a relief to her."

"Forward there, at the guns!" called out the Spanish captain.

"Ay, ay, señor," answered the bow gunners in a breath.

"Turn your guns upon the smaller craft; but fire to cripple her sticks, and not her hull!"

The order was quickly obeyed, and the third shot brought down the lugger's foremast.

A shout went up from the Spanish schooner at their success; but Don Diablo, with a muttered oath, sprung to his feet as his crippled vessel broached to, and, drawing Nita toward him, said, calmly:

"Have no fear, my brave girl; Conrado will soon reach us."

"I do not fear, señor; but that shot tells me how bitterly my brother feels toward me, for he would rather see me dead than your bride," she answered, instinctively discerning why the schooner had fired upon them.

It was now a critical moment for those on the little lugger, for the waves dashed over her decks, and, alone, Don Diablo was unable to lower her remaining sail, which, as the boom was caught by the wreck of the foremast, threatened to capsize it at any passing gust of wind.

The schooner was also coming on at full speed, and was scarcely two miles away, while the lugger was fully half that distance from them.

But calmly Don Diablo and Nita stood awaiting the alternative, while Alena, weeping and wailing, had thrown herself prostrate upon the deck.

A few moments thus passed away, the schooner firing steadily at both luggers, and then the rescuing craft swept around under the stern of the smaller one, the skillful hand of Conrado Estevan laid her alongside, a dozen forms sprung down upon the deck of the crippled polacca, and the next instant Nita Sabinas was on board the buccaneer.

A shout went up from the crew as, followed by her maid, and the men with her baggage, she disappeared in the lugger's cabin, leaning on the arm of Don Diablo.

"Set that craft on fire, lads, and jump on board, for we must get out of range of yonder Spaniard's guns," called out Conrado Estevan from the helm.

Quickly his order was obeyed, and the two luggers swung apart, the smaller one on fire, just as Don Diablo came from the cabin.

"The señorita dropped this, captain," and Anton placed in his hand a crumpled piece of paper.

Glancing over it the face of the pirate chief grew black with passion, and his eyes fairly blazed beneath the dark brows as he turned them upon Conrado Estevan, as he shouted:

"Ha! traitor, you shall die for this! forward there, Mendez, Vicente, Gomez!"

"Ay, ay, señor captain," cried a trio of voices, and several seamen came aft at a run.

"Do you obey me on this deck, devils, or yonder man?" and he pointed to Conrado Estevan.

"You, good captain," answered a number of voices, fairly frightened at the livid face and burning eyes of the pirate chief.

"Then rig a plank for a traitor to walk to his death on."

All looked startled, but those ordered sprung

to obey, as again came an order from the set lips:

"Now seize that traitor and bind him!"

He pointed to Conrado El Saltador, who, ere he was aware of what the chief intended, was seized and securely ironed, just as Vincente called out:

"The plank is ready, señor captain."

"Then, Conrado Estevan, the Leaper, if you are not a coward you will take that road to perdition," hissed the infuriated corsair.

"I am no coward, Don Diablo," was the firm response.

"You are a traitor though, and hence I punish you."

"You lie in your false throat, sir pirate," was the angry retort.

"No words; yonder lies your walk, take it, or suffer death by torture," was the merciless response.

El Saltador cast one glance at the lugger, which was flying seaward with fearful speed, and then he turned his eyes upon the Spanish schooner, now not a mile distant, and steering so as to head the buccaneer off before he could gain an offing, while a hot fire was poured upon the chase.

Then he glanced over the crew and saw that there was no hope, for they stood cowed before the terrible chief, who stood regarding him with savage menace.

"Don Diablo, I have done you no wrong; but I am in your power, and I shrink not from the death you condemn me to die."

"But, cruel devil that you are, may the fate that you now visit upon me, one day be yours."

He ceased speaking and stepped upon the plank, while Don Diablo said in his clear, but ironical tones:

"Now, sir, my compliments to Satan, and tell him that Don Diablo sent you."

CHAPTER XIII.

A LESSON WELL LEARNED.

"WHAT madness is this, Captain Nevil Vane?"

The voice was that of Nita Sabinas, but the words were ringing, and the real name of Don Diablo, pronounced then and there, caused him to start visibly and turn pale, while he wheeled upon the speaker.

The condemned man, Conrado Estevan, also heard that question from the maiden's lips, and he too turned, just as he was about to step fearlessly forward into eternity.

He beheld Nita Sabinas as white as a corpse, but with angry eyes bent upon the chief, while her form was drawn up, her bosom heaving, and her whole attitude that of indignant reproach.

She had just stepped out of the cabin, where Don Diablo had left her with her octoroon maid, and just in time to save the Cuban from walking the plank into the sea.

She beheld him, white-faced but fearless, proudly holding himself up, and with flashing eyes meeting the punishment Don Diablo was visiting upon him.

"Back into the cabin, Nita, and do not contest my humor," angrily said the chief.

"No, Nevil Vane, I will not return to the cabin, and I will contest your cruel humor," she said, haughtily.

"What! do you dare me?" and it was evident that Don Diablo was losing his temper with the maiden.

As her answer was about to leave her lips a shot from the schooner tore through the bulwarks, killed one of the seamen wounded another and knocked a water cask to atoms.

But with a steady voice she spoke:

"I dare rebuke you, Don Diablo, when you are going to take the life of the man to whom you owe your escape from the garote."

"He is a traitor, Nita."

"A traitor, and to whom and what?" she asked, scornfully, while El Saltador and the crew looked on, with what interest may well be imagined.

"A traitor to me, his chief."

"I owe you no allegiance, Don Diablo; like yourself I am an outlaw, and we became *confrères* in crime merely because it suited your fancy and mine so to be."

"You saw in me one to aid, or rather protect you, and I saw in you a valuable ally; hence the compact."

"No, oh, no, I am no traitor," was the bold reply of El Saltador.

"This paper will prove otherwise, señor," and the chief held up the piece of crumpled paper which Nita had dropped.

Conrado, at the sight of it, did not change a muscle, while Nita grew a shade paler.

"Do you say that you did not write this?" asked Don Diablo, triumphantly.

"No, I wrote it."

"Oh, do not judge him by that; he knew me when I was a girl, and knowing you as you are, he sought my home and threw that note of warning into my open window."

"Read it carefully, Don Diablo, and see that it only implores me not to leave home, kindred, and all I hold dear, to become the bride of a man whose name and whole life have been blackened with infamy and cruelty."

"Do you wish me to regret that I heeded not

his warning?" and the tears came into the maiden's beautiful eyes.

"Oh, no," sneered Don Diablo, "but do you say that he was not a traitor to me, to thus warn you against me?"

"He was truer to his hope of saving me from ruin than to his allegiance to you."

It was an unfortunate remark, for Don Diablo's face darkened again, and he said, angrily:

"In my mind treachery is worthy of death, and that man, Conrado El Saltador, is doomed."

"Gomez, get a handspike and urge him to the walk he so shrinks from, and from which this lovely lady would save him."

The face of the Cuban flushed at the insulting words, and the obedient seaman sprang to obey the command of his cruel master.

But all were struck dumb with horror at seeing Nita Sabinas suddenly draw from the folds of her riding habit, which she still wore, a small silver-mounted pistol, and press it against her temple, while she cried in resolute tones:

"Give the order for that brave man to take his death-leap and I send this bullet to my brain, Don Diablo, the Pirate."

"*Nombre de Dios!* Nita Sabinas, what would you do?" cried the chief, in dread alarm.

"Keep my word, by the love of the Mother Mary!"

"No, you will not do a crime like that?"

"Ay, will I, for I learned the lesson well from you, Don Diablo, when you protected your life with a knife held over my heart."

"Order that man released from his irons or I fire!"

There was no doubting her intention to keep her word, for firm resolve was upon every feature of her face.

And all stood spellbound gazing upon her, while El Saltador said calmly:

"Señorita, do not such an act to save my worthless, wretched life, for if spared now, sooner or later the end must come for me."

"I will save your life, Conrado Estevan, or die. If the latter, the words of that man to me are false and he does not love me. This will prove if he loves his revenge more than he does me."

"Nita—"

But as the word trembled on the lips of Don Diablo, there came a broadside from the Spanish schooner, hurled full upon the flying lugger.

Then followed a crashing of timbers, shrieks of mortal anguish, and the bulwark upon which rested the death-plank was shattered, and down into the sea sunk El Saltador, but whether killed by the shot of the schooner, or to sink to his death, dragged down by his irons to the dark-blue depths, none could tell.

Momentarily crippled in hull and rigging, it was an instant of peril for the lugger; but above the uproar arose the trumpet-like tones of the indomitable chief, commanding order, and discipline was at once restored, the dead and the wounded alike were hurled into the waters, the shattered rigging was repaired, and once more the lugger was flying on her way.

Seeing that, in luffing up to deliver her broadside, the schooner had lost considerable time, while his own vessel's speed had not been checked, Don Diablo gave orders to his helmsman not to deviate from his course and approached the statue-like maiden, who stood white and silent, gazing down into the wild waters, as if to penetrate their foaming depths and discover the dead forms lying there.

"Nita, you triumphed," he said, in his soft tones.

"Death triumphed, say rather," was the cold reply.

"That was an unfortunate fire from the schooner, Nita; had it not been for that I would have proved my love for you and set El Saltador free."

"Nevil Vane, would you have done as you say?" and she looked him eagerly in the face.

"Yes, Nita, as I love you I would have done so."

"I feared otherwise; forgive me."

"Willingly, my sweet girl. Now return to the cabin, for I fear for you here amid this flying iron."

"And you, Nevil?"

"I will not be hit, for Fate does not yet intend me to die; but if I lost you, my darling, I would not care to live, so go below, please."

"And the schooner?"

"Will not overtake us, for see we have run the gantlet of the worst fire, and this vessel will outlast her."

"And then?"

"What do you mean, Nita?"

"I mean, what is the destination of your lugger?"

Intuitively he seemed to understand her meaning, and answered:

"There is a small seaport down the coast, a few hours' sail from here, and thither, as soon as I drop the schooner in the darkness, I will go, as I have business there with a padre."

"Thank you, Nevil, I will not doubt you again; but oh! it will be many a long day before I forget poor Conrado Estevan and his sad fate."

As she spoke she turned away and entered the cabin, not seeing the dark shadow that again

flitted over the face of Don Diablo, or hearing his muttered words:

"*Nombre de Dios!* what if she had seen the signal I gave Gomez to spring the trap and hurl El Saltador and his plank into the sea?"

"Well, the schooner did me one good turn, for with El Saltador alive, I would fear for my beautiful Señorita Sabinas, for women are as fickle as these West Indian breezes."

With a harsh laugh he then turned away and devoted himself to the duties devolving upon him.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PIRATE AND THE PADRE.

WITH a speed that surprised those on the Spanish schooner, and caused the superstitious members of the crew to believe that she was indeed sailed by the devil, the lugger sped away from her pursuer, and shortly after night came on easily eluded her in the darkness.

Having thrown the Spaniard off his track, Don Diablo immediately headed for a small seaport, or rather fishing hamlet on the coast, and ran boldly up to an anchorage nearly opposite the town.

"The padre shall come on board and unite us, my dear Nita," he said, as he ordered a boat alongside, and descended into it.

"I am content, Nevil; but oh! what does my love for you not drive me to become—the bride of a buccaneer," she said, sorrowfully.

"Do you regret it, Nita?"

"I would regret to give you up more."

"If you care not to become my wife in all willingness, I will return you at once to your own home in all honor."

"No, no, I love you, and loving you, I am blind to your faults."

"You are a noble girl, Nita, and I am sorry I am not more worthy of you."

"I will not be gone long, and the padre will return with me; give way, men!"

The boat moved shoreward in the darkness and was soon lost to the view of the watching maiden.

"Dona Nita, that señor is awful handsome, awful nice-spoken, but he is awful bad," and Alena the octoroon slipped up to her mistress's side.

"Silence, Alena; you must breathe no word against the man I am going to marry," said Nita, sternly.

"I only said, Dona Nita, it is a pity a man can have such a handsome face and ugly heart."

"Ah, Alena, I would that he were different; but whatever he is, I love him."

"Come, let us go into the cabin and prepare for my marriage; oh, how strange it all seems—Nita Sabinas to be wedded to a buccaneer, and with her own consent."

"Love, love, you rule these hearts of ours, and make them happy or wretched; which will mine be, I wonder?"

She descended to the cabin, followed by her faithful maid, and began preparing for her marriage, with the same feeling in her heart she might feel in dressing herself for her execution.

But she had a nature that was governed wholly by her heart, and having taken the fearful step she would not retract her pledge.

In the mean time Don Diablo landed at a quiet part of the village, and, with a word to his men to be on the alert for his signal, moved at a brisk step up the street.

Following the shore for a distance, he soon came in sight of a wall, within which was a gloomy-looking house, a still gloomier church, and around the latter were the graves that marked the last resting-places of those who had gone into the Great Beyond.

A rope hung on the outside of an iron-studded gate, and pulling it, Don Diablo heard the answering jingle of a bell in the somber house.

Soon after a form approached through the darkness, and a deep voice asked:

"Who is it that seeks entrance in this monastery?"

"A son who would confess his sins, give an offering of gold to the church, and ask a service at the hands of the holy padre," was Don Diablo's firm reply.

Whether it was the offering of gold that caused the padre to ask no further questions I know not; but certain it is that the gate was quickly opened and the chief stepped fearlessly into the inclosure.

"Come, my son, follow me!" said the padre, speaking, as had Don Diablo, in Spanish.

Following him, the chief was led to the house, and asked to be seated in a room that was far from uncomfortable, and yet was not a cheerful place.

Once seated and Don Diablo gazed into the face of the padre, who returned the compliment with a direct stare, and a look as though he had before seen his visitor.

The padre was a man of many years, to judge by his long white hair and beard; but his gait was firm, his form erect, and his eyes bright and piercing.

He was dressed in the order of his church, and after seating himself asked in deep, almost stern tones:

"Well, my son, name your business."

"First, I wish to give you this as a souvenir," and Don Diablo tossed a well-filled purse of gold upon the table.

The padre poured the contents out and made no comment, though it was evident the sum pleased and surprised him.

"Well, you would confess, I believe, my son?" he asked.

A rude laugh broke from the chief's lips, and he answered:

"No, that was a bait to get you to admit me.

"I have more to confess, padre, than you have years to listen to, and all the absolution you could give would be but mockery, for I am sold to Satan forever and aye.

"But I need your services, and will pay for them."

"What can I do, my son?"

"I have an idea to marry; the lady is youthful, beautiful, rich, and a good Catholic."

"And marries you with her free consent?"

"Yes."

"She is not forced to do so, then?"

"No."

"Strange."

"What is strange, padre?"

"That she is not forced into a union with you."

"Ask her."

"And she knows you?"

"What! do you know me?"

"Yes."

"As what?"

"A pirate."

"Ha! have we met before?"

"I hope we never shall again."

"Don't dodge, padre; have we ever before met?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Some years ago."

"Where?"

"In Havana."

"And you recognize me?"

"Yes, Don Diablo."

"So be it; I am Don Diablo, and I desire to marry, and I wish your services."

"Where is the lady?"

"On board my vessel."

"And your vessel?"

"Lies within a few cable-lengths of here."

"You are bold to run in here, where cruisers come almost daily."

"I left one to come here; but what care I?"

"You may be taken and garroted."

"Your prayers, you claim, protect you; my guardian spirit, Satan, protects me," was the reckless reply.

"We will one day see which is the best protected, you or I, my son."

"Very well, padre; but for the present we will act; so come, I wish you to go with me upon my vessel."

"I cannot."

"I will pay you one hundred pesos."

"No!"

"Two hundred."

"No!"

"Five hundred."

"Money will not tempt me, my son."

"What then?"

"If you wish to marry the lady, bring her here."

"I dare not."

"Then seek a priest elsewhere."

"I cannot."

"Then our interview is at an end, my son."

"I say no, for you must go with me."

"Look here, Don Diablo, red-handed searover that you confess yourself to be, you cannot buy me to do that which I care not to do," was the stern reply of the padre.

"Bah! my price is not enough; you want a thousand pesos," was the insulting retort.

"No, gold will not buy me."

"But you will marry me to the maiden if I bring her here?"

"Yes, upon one condition."

"Well?"

"That I tell her who and what you are."

"Do so."

"Well, bring her within the next hour."

"Why not at once?"

"Because I have a sacred duty to perform."

"So be it; I will be here within the hour, padre," and Don Diablo wheeled on his heel and left the gloomy abode of the padre.

CHAPTER XV.

UNFORGOTTEN FACES.

HARDLY had the gate closed upon the tall form of Don Diablo, as he started upon his return to the lugger after Nita Sabinas, when the padre raised his clinched fist in the darkness and shook it after the retreating pirate, while he cried with almost savage earnestness:

"Aha! Reno Quesala, the curse of sea and shore, I have you at last, for an All-wise Power has led you into my hands, and your days, ay, your hours are numbered.

"Marry you to some innocent girl whom you would drag to misery, you would have me; but, oh no, the ceremony would be mockery in your case.

"Father, forgive me! but the sight of that

human fiend brings up the revenge and hatred I believed was forever buried in my heart.

"No, no, this white hair and beard disguise me so that he does not recall my face.

"And yet his deeds turned my hair and beard white.

"Here is the wound he gave me in my side, and which he believed had killed me; but, no, I did not die; I lived to face him once more and have my revenge upon him for the wrong he did my beautiful daughter and myself."

While speaking the padre had stood at the gate, his hand upraised and slowly shaking, as if in menace.

Suddenly he turned and walked rapidly back to his gloomy home, and entering touched a bell.

A dark-faced man entered, one who evidently had African blood in his veins, and was the only other occupant of the old building besides the padre.

"Nana, go with this letter to the captain-commandante, and return with him, coming in by the gate of the cemetery; here is the key."

Nana took the key and a hastily-written note, and then disappeared in a hurry, leaving the padre pacing to and fro evidently in painful reverie.

Within half an hour there was heard the sound of feet without, and it recalled the padre to himself, and he said, anxiously:

"What if he should have arrived before the commandante. No, it is not the pirate; ah, señor, I am glad to see you," and the padre turned to a young Spanish officer who had followed Nana into the house.

"Padre, the commandante was absent; and your servant telling me your note was important I opened and read it," said the young man, who wore a lieutenant's uniform.

"You did right, my son; and your men?"

"Are with me, six in all."

"It is a small force, for they are to meet a most desperate man."

"Who, may I ask, holy father, as your note simply stated a noted pirate?"

"Don Diablo."

"Ha! if we can but secure that human fiend we are indeed fortunate."

"But I have six good men with me."

"Which with Nana and myself will make nine."

"A match for half a dozen pirates, at any rate; but you, padre, will not surely join in the fight, if it should come to that?"

"Yes, for Don Diablo made me a priest, as the sorrows brought on me by that accursed man made me enter the church, and he shall never escape my just revenge."

"But come, señor, place your men just here," and the padre drew aside a heavy curtain that concealed an alcove in the room.

The half-dozen soldiers took their stands, with the lieutenant, behind the curtain, and the padre resumed his seat at the table, just as the gate bell rung violently.

"Go and admit them, Nana, if it is the chief and his party," said the padre, sternly, yet with perfect calmness, though his face was very pale.

Nana disappeared and soon after there came a knock on the door.

"Come in!"

With the invitation in stepped, Don Diablo, and leaning on his arm was Nita Sabinas, pale yet calm.

Behind the two came Anton, and then Alena, the octoroon, and stepping into the room the door was closed behind them.

"Well, padre, I have obeyed your command, and as the mountain would not go to Mohammed, Mohammed has come to the mountain," said Don Diablo, with a sneer.

"You are welcome, my son; is this your bride that is to be?"

"Yes, Padre—Padre— I declare I know not your name."

"Infelix, my son."

"An unhappy name indeed; but in spite of your prayers, penitence and piety you padres manage to keep in the sunshine of life, it seems to me, and give the shadows the go by."

"Here, Nita, this is the most holy Padre Infelix, and priest, this is the Señorita Nita Sabinas, who desires to become the Señora Reno Quesala."

The padre turned to the maiden, and asked in his deep tones:

"Maiden, have you thought of the step you now would take?"

"I have, father," was the firm reply.

"You wish to be married to this man?"

"I do."

"You know who he is?"

"I do."

"That he is—"

"Don Diablo, men call him."

The padre fairly started at the words of Nita, for he had felt convinced up to that moment that the pirate chief had deceived the maiden as to his real identity.

"And knowing this you would marry him?"

"Yes."

"You love him more than you abhor his crimes?"

"Yes."

"He will bring sorrow upon you."

"I will take my chances as all women do who marry."

"He may end his days upon the gallows."

"I will be there to soothe his last hours."

"He may die within the hour, leaving you a widow."

"I would rather be his widow than live without him," was the firm response, while Don Diablo broke in with:

"You paint shady pictures, padre; but go on with your work, for time flies."

"Yes, Don Diablo, from this moment for you time will fly all too fast, for you are my prisoner!"

The priest's voice rung like a clarion as he uttered the last few words, and he stood pointing at the chief, while the curtain was thrown aside and six soldiers stood with muskets leveled at the broad breast of the chief, while the officer cried sternly:

"Yes, señor pirate, surrender or die!"

Nita started back with a cry of horror, and then threw herself upon the breast of the chief, and twined her arms around his neck, as though to shield him from danger by her slender form.

And Don Diablo?

Not a muscle of his face changed, unless it was to have a scornful smile curl about the lips, while his dark eyes glowed first at the Spaniards and then at the padre.

"Do you surrender, Don Diablo, or shall the soldiers fire?" asked the priest.

"Nita, release me, while I have a word with this holy padre," was the cool response, and there was something in the tone and look of the man that caused Nita Sabinas to instantly obey, though she still remained at his side.

"Padre, do you consider me blind, that I did not know your face?" asked Don Diablo, with a sneer.

"Know me?" gasped the priest.

"Yes, Don Hildos, of Mexico, I know that we met in the long ago, and that I deemed you dead, for the wound I gave you was meant to kill."

"Your hair has grown as white as snow, and your beard has changed you greatly, but my eyes are not deceived, your face is not forgotten."

"Then, Reno Quesala, the pirate, you will know that at last your red path was ended by my hand."

"In misery, in despair, almost maddened by what your crimes left me, I turned to the church for comfort, and believed I had forever forgotten revenge."

"But no, your coming here this night, to drag another young girl to ruin as you did my poor child, aroused the devil in my nature, and I determined to entrap you and forever end your dark deeds."

"For this reason I would not go upon your vessel, but lured you here, and now six Spanish soldiers cover your heart with their guns, and a move on your part will sound your death-knell."

"Now, sir, know that you owe to me your death."

"Place him in irons, señor lieutenant, and lead him to prison, from whence he shall only walk forth to his death."

Obedient to the command of the padre, the Spanish officer moved forward, sword in one hand and irons in the other.

But suddenly he halted at the sharply-spoken command that issued from the lips of Don Diablo:

"Hold! Move one step, Señor Spaniard, and you are a dead man!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A PADRE AT BAY.

THAT the stern command of Don Diablo startled both the padre and Spanish officer, may well be inferred, when they believed him wholly in their power, to see him assume an attitude not only defiant but hostile.

"What mean you, sir pirate?" asked the Spaniard, gazing with fiery eyes upon him.

"Just what I now tell you, señor; you, your men, and this padre here, are my prisoners, not I yours," was the cool reply.

"You are a fool, Reno Quesala, the pirate, for these soldiers cover your heart with their guns," remarked the padre, in angry tones.

"Not such a fool as you take me for, Don Hildos, if you thought that I did not know you recognized me as I did you, and saw through your plot to entrap me."

"And have done so, for those men will kill you if you raise your hand to resist," said the padre.

"A better death to die, surely, than by the garrote, or at the yard arm."

"You seek that death then, do you?" eagerly asked the Spanish officer, making a motion for his soldiers to be ready.

A light laugh broke from the lips of the pirate, and he answered in his calm way:

"I seek not death of any kind; but when it comes I will meet it fearlessly."

"This talk is nonsense; either surrender your arms or I will give my soldiers orders to fire upon you," sternly said the Spaniard, and at his words, Nita moved once more before the man she so madly loved.

"Sir Spaniard, and you, padre, let me repeat that *you are my prisoners*, for a score of guns cover your hearts," and pushing Nita gently one side, the chief cried in ringing tones:

"Devils, show yourselves!"

The result was a complete surprise, and an alarming one for the Spaniards and the padre, for a dozen men bounded into the open door, and in each of the two grated windows appeared several musket muzzles, covering the hearts of those who had believed Don Diablo wholly in their power.

"Now, sir priest, it is for me to make terms, for you see you are entrapped," coolly said the pirate, as the Spanish officer and his men lowered their arms, in token of submission, well knowing the utter madness of resistance.

"You hold the vantage, Reno Quesala, as always you seem to do; but you can make no terms with me," was the bold reply of the padre.

"You shall see if you do not obey my commands," the chief said, sternly.

"I obey the commands of no man."

"We shall see; I came here with this lady to have you make her my wife, so put on your robes and get to your holy work, for I would not tarry here longer than there is need for."

"This Spaniard and his men may be witnesses of the ceremony," and Don Diablo turned satirically toward the Spaniards.

"I will not commit so vile a sacrilege, Reno Quesala," said the padre, firmly.

"Will not, are two strong words, padre."

"I mean just what I say."

"By the Heaven you adore, but I say that *you shall*."

"You have no power to make me do wrong."

"Men, seize that padre."

The crew of the lugger quickly obeyed their chief, the priest offering no resistance.

"Mateo, you are a man without heart, so I order you to do my bidding," and the chief turned to a villainous-faced Mexican who stood near.

"*Si, señor*," answered the Mexican, quietly.

"I have ordered this man to perform the rites of marriage between this lady and myself."

"*Si, señor*," again said the Mexican.

"I give him just one minute to say whether he will or not."

"I will not," boldly interrupted the priest.

Unheeding the remark Don Diablo continued:

"If he obeys, well and good, and I will pay him gold in abundance."

"But, Mateo, if he refuse, then you do your duty."

"And that duty, señor chief?" asked the Mexican.

"Then never again shall he perform a holy rite, for I shall leave my mark upon him," savagely said Don Diablo.

"And that mark, señor chief?" asked Mateo, in the same quiet way in which he had before spoken.

"I order you then, Mateo, to cut his tongue out of his vile throat."

A burst of horror broke from every one present, even from the lips of the pirate crew, while Nita Sabinas vainly tried to speak, but seemed terrified beyond movement or utterance.

"Now, padre, you know your doom; one minute have you to obey or refuse, and Mateo will do his work."

"I will not do your bidding, Reno Quesala, suffer what I may," was the unflinching reply of the Padre Infelix.

"Then, Mateo, do your work so well that even the angels cannot understand his mumbled prayers," was the savage command.

And at the cruel order all started, except the priest himself, and the Spaniards seemed half inclined to attempt a desperate struggle to save the padre, who stood pale, but calm and fearless before his enemy.

"Señor chief, this padre is a priest of my church, for I am a Catholic, and I refuse to do your bidding," said Mateo.

With burning eyes Don Diablo wheeled upon him, while he hissed forth:

"Dog of a Mexican, vilest cut-throat that sails the seas, do you refuse to obey an order of mine?"

"Against this padre, yes, señor chief."

"Then you shall die!"

Out from his belt was quickly drawn a pistol, and the flash and report followed.

But, with the ring of the weapon mingled a piercing shriek, and two forms fell upon the floor.

Those two were Nita Sabinas and Mateo, for, to shield the man from death at Don Diablo's hands, the maiden had thrown herself forward, and the bullet had cut through her flesh and yet still found its destined mark in the heart of the Mexican.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RETREAT.

"NOMBRE DE DIOS! I have killed her!"

The cry was heart-rending in its pathetic sorrow, and, uttered in the full intensity of grief, even affected those who heard it from the lips of Don Diablo.

Springing forward he kicked to one side the

body of the dead Mateo, and raised in his arms the beautiful Nita.

Pallid as a corpse, and with no sign of life, she lay upon his arm, the crimson blood staining the dress, and the lovely eyes closed, it seemed as though in death's last sleep.

By her side knelt Alena the octoroon, dazed with grief, and in the background stood the lugger's crew, silent and grim.

Upon the other side was the padre, calm, fearless and sorrowful, and behind him the Spanish officer and his soldiers stood like statues.

"She is not dead, but I fear me may die; but whether she lives or dies, Don Hildos, thou accursed padre, thou shalt not escape me this time."

"I am ready to meet death even at your hands, Don Diablo, for you have taken from me all that I held dear in the past, so why not take my life?"

The padre spoke without the quiver of a nerve and faced his implacable foe with undaunted mien.

"I will take thy worthless life, Don Hildos, and this time there shall be no doubt but that my bullet goes home."

As he spoke, in his cool, cutting tones, and still supporting the wounded maiden upon his left arm and knee, he drew a second pistol from his belt and leveled it.

"No, no, señor chief, do not, I implore you, commit a crime so foul," cried the Spanish officer, springing forward.

But the weapon already covered the heart of the unmoved padre, and, at the words of the Spaniard, the finger touched the trigger.

But though the flint struck fairly, the powder flashed in the pan, and no report followed.

Instantly Don Diablo turned deadly pale, and arose to his feet, still holding in his arms the unconscious Nita, while he said, in a hoarse voice:

"Don Hildos, I owe allegiance to but one, and that one is my master, Satan; but my teachings are to spare the one I fail to kill upon a third trial."

"I have tried three times now to take your life, and, having failed, I now spare you."

"Back to the lugger, men!"

He turned, as he issued the order, and, without another word strode away bearing Nita in his strong arms, and with the wailing Alena treading close on his heels, while his crew in silence followed him.

At the gate they came upon Nana, the padre's servant, under the guard of one of the lugger's crew.

"Release that fellow and come on board," sternly said the chief, and he continued on his way to the shore, sprung into a waiting boat, and his crew following, all were soon on board the lugger.

"Get under way at once, Anton, and have the men at their guns, for the fort will give us a greeting as we go by," said the pirate, sternly, and he went on into the cabin of his vessel, still closely followed by the weeping Octoroon.

"Silence, girl!" he said, sternly, as he laid Nita gently down upon a lounge, and then bent over her and stripped the dress from her fair shoulder.

As he did so, the act displaying a marble neck, through one shoulder of which the cruel bullet had cut its way, the chief cried, fervently:

"Thank God! it is but a flesh wound, and the shock only caused her to faint."

Instantly the eyes of the maiden opened wide and gazed into his own, while the soft voice said:

"Yes, I am not severely hurt, but it is your mark, Nevil."

"Forgive me, Nita, and forget the act, for it was not meant for you," and the chief knelt beside her.

"And he for whom it was meant?" she asked, significantly.

"He disobeyed my orders," was the evasive reply.

"Where is he?"

"Dead."

"Oh, Nevil!" and she covered her face with her hands.

"Nita, do not blame me, for remember I live upon a powder magazine, as it were, and if I relax discipline one instant, all would be lost, for these mad devils would quickly end my career."

"Give up the life you lead, Nevil."

"How can I?"

"I will show you."

"Where, in the wide world, could I find a refuge?" he asked, plaintively, and into his eyes came a hunted look.

"Nevil, the navies of the sea have tried hard to capture Don Diablo and put him to death, and they have failed; but I have taken you, and I will not put you to death, but say, rather, live for me, and we will go far from here and try, in our own love, to bury the past and its red scenes."

"Will you go, Nevil?"

He had been quietly and skillfully dressing the wound as they were talking together; but at her words he paused, and said:

"Ah, Nita, the only joy for me in life is to mingle in combat with my fellow-men."

"But to you I will be all that I can be— Ha! there opens the fort upon us, and I must on deck."

He kissed her brow as he spoke, sprung to his feet and ran upon deck, to be met by Anton, who said, gravely:

"Señor chief, the fort opens as you see, but we don't mind that, as we can run by; but look there!"

He pointed, as he spoke, to the mouth of the inlet, a mile below, into which was just coming the Spanish schooner that had before been in chase of the lugger.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A GANTLET OF FIRE.

"ANTON, I'll take the helm."

"*Si, señor chief*," and Anton stepped aside, as Don Diablo, having caught sight of the Spanish schooner coming in, and which he readily recognized with his night-glass, took his place at the helm, just as another shot came from the fort for the lugger to heave to.

"The commandant of that fortress is a fool, if he thinks I would obey his iron summons," muttered the chief, and calling to his crew he ordered all sail spread upon the lugger.

Instantly the order was obeyed, and with an alacrity that showed the crew knew well the danger they were in.

The wind was stiff and strong, blowing a good twelve-knot breeze, and Don Diablo felt that he could force the lugger into a fifteen-knot pace, for he had the pressure on his sails from the right direction, and almost a straight run out to open water.

Should he find that the schooner could cut him off, he would try another plan, but not until the very last moment.

And on the lugger went, gaining greater speed as she got from under the land's lee, yet bringing upon her the fire of the fort, which, however, flew wide of the mark.

"Those accursed Spaniards are too nervous to aim well; show them that we are not flurried, Anton," said Don Diablo, coolly.

Instantly Anton gave the order, and from keel to truck the lugger shook with the discharge of her broadside of four guns.

And straight into the huge ports of the fortress went the iron balls, and then came crashing of timbers, shrieks and loud orders in the voices of the officers.

"Well done, ye devils! you showed them we knew how to aim; give them another lesson," cried Don Diablo.

Again the lugger's guns burst forth fire and smoke, and once more it was evident that the aim had been true, for but two of the cannon of the fortress could return the fire.

"If I had my old schooner I could wreck that fort," cried Don Diablo, joyfully; but then he added, as he glanced ahead:

"There is our worst foe, Anton, so turn your guns upon him, for he cannot fire, for fear of knocking the town to pieces."

It was evident that the wily chief had been holding his course just for this very purpose, and had cleverly gotten into a position, that if the schooner fired upon him its guns would rake the little town.

And, at the first shot from the lugger, those on the schooner, which had been rapidly coming up to aid the fort, seemingly having recognized the Tartar they had caught, realized that the pirate chief had again outwitted them, for, though the iron shot went cutting through their hull and rigging, they dared not return the fire on account of being in direct range of the town.

To extricate himself from this unfortunate predicament the Spanish captain at once headed across the inlet, so as to open fire upon the lugger with his broadside without danger to the town.

But Don Diablo instantly changed the course of the lugger, and kept her running parallel with the schooner, while from each broadside he kept up a constant fire upon the fort and the Spanish vessel.

His crew saw his clever maneuver, and that they were punishing both the feebly-garrisoned fortress and the schooner, and themselves escaping almost unscathed, and they gave their chief three rousing cheers, which he did not notice in the slightest degree.

Putting away on another tack, though still holding in the direction of the town, the Spanish schooner tried to throw her enemy off, as it were; but the keen eyes of Don Diablo watching her closely, sent the lugger about instantly, and held to her with the persistency of a bloodhound.

The situation of the two vessels was now one of deepest interest to all on board, and also to the garrison of the fortress and denizens of the town, all of whom had been roused by the firing.

With the inlet, two miles in width, in front of the town, and increasing to two leagues at its mouth, and deep water throughout; the town on the left bank, and just below it the fortress, and the two vessels, the one a mile distant, the other not half that distance, it can be seen that

Don Diablo held it in his power to escape the fire of the schooner, whose commander dare not send his shot into the town.

But the two vessels were nearing each other rapidly, and the daring chief soon got his lugger in direct range so that the fortress dare not fire upon him for fear of hurling its iron upon the schooner.

Thus, the pirate, by his skillful maneuvering, was avoiding the fire from fortress and Spanish cruiser, and at the same time his iron hail was tearing huge rents in the fort and also cutting the rigging and wounding the hull of his adversary on the water.

Elated by their success the crew yelled like madmen, hearing which, and the roaring of the guns, yet feeling no shock of iron hitting the lugger, Nita Sabinas went on deck, for the pain of her wound was slight.

There she beheld the terrible chief standing fearlessly at the helm, and, in spite of his crimes, he looked majestically grand to her, and she crept to his side, awed by the wild scene, the thunder of the guns, and the shrieks of the joy-maddened pirate crew.

"What means all this, Nevil?" she asked.

"Ah, Nita, you here in such a scene? no, no, you must return to the cabin, for this is no sight for you; it is fit only to give joy to a heart like mine."

"What you revel in, Nevil, I, who love you so desperately, can at least gaze on," she answered.

"But your wound, Nita?"

"Is slight; the bullet, as you know, but cut its way through the point of my shoulder."

"But will leave a scar that will ever give me pain, dearest."

"It will be your mark, Nevil."

"Do not speak of it, Nita; see, the schooner has discovered she cannot throw me off, and intends to lie in wait for me to run by."

"Now, Sir Spaniard, if that is your game, I will show you that you can harm me little."

"At the guns there!"

"Ay, ay, señor capitán!" shrieked the wild crew, in chorus.

"Train every gun well, and—"

"Hold! Nevil, you forget that my brother is on yonder vessel, for I recognize her now."

"Would you slay him and thus bring my everlasting curse upon you?"

He checked the command upon his lips, and turning gazed upon her face, for the pinnacle light shone full upon it.

What he read in that white, firm, beautiful face caused him to change his mind, for he said, softly:

"Go below, Nita, I will not fire again on the schooner, unless—"

"Unless what, Nevil?" she asked, as he paused.

"Unless a shot should strike you; then, Nita Sabinas, I will board yonder craft, few men as I have with me, and not one of its crew shall escape death."

His look was so terrible as he spoke that Nita knew well he would keep his word, and quickly she shrunk away and retreated to the cabin, while to her ears came the order:

"Cease firing, men; we'll run by that craft now, and once on blue water will show her a clean pair of heels."

The crew stared in utter amazement at their chief; but there was that in the tone of voice they had heard, and in the tall, splendid form they saw by the moonlight, standing erect at the helm, that forbade all questioning his authority, and they stood in moody silence at their guns.

And now, straight for open water Don Diablo headed his vessel, seemingly unheeding the presence of the Spaniard.

But, surprised at his sudden silence and seeing his course, the Spanish officer steered so as to head him off, while out of range by this maneuver of the town, he opened fire upon the flying lugger, while the fortress was also enabled to bring her guns upon the pirate, without further danger of sending them crashing into the schooner.

But grimly silent under the double fire the lugger held on, going at a pace that astonished the schooner's crew, and, as if by a miracle, escaping the shots poured upon her.

Believing that it was the intention of the pirate to board him, as the two vessels drew near together, the Spanish captain called his boarders to be ready to repel boarders.

Rapidly the two vessels now came nearer each other, the Spanish schooner with the wind on her starboard side and with a fairly free sheet, the pirate with the wind almost aft and the huge lateen sails thrown a-starboard, and driving the lugger along at terrific speed.

After the pirate the fort was sending iron shots, and straight at her the Spaniard was firing, hitting her now and then, but seemingly with no fatal effect, as her rigging remained intact, excepting a few holes cut in the canvas.

Nearer and nearer, until those on the Spaniard plainly beheld the lugger's crew at their guns, stripped to the waist, grim and savage-looking, but receiving their fire in silence.

And at the helm, tall, fearless and guiding

the lugger on her way, they saw the form of Don Diablo.

Nearer and nearer, until, seeing the lugger veer off, as if to avoid boarding, the Spaniard's order was distinctly heard by the pirates:

"He sheers away, lads; helmsman, lay her alongside; grappling-irons this way; boarders ahoy! cast!"

But, as the irons were thrown the bows of the lugger swept away, her sails were trimmed with a celerity and skill that was marvelous, and the grapnels fell into the water and the schooner swept entirely up into the wind, while the pirate was dashing away at a course on a right angle from that he had a moment before been sailing off.

Though the shock of a collision would have been terrible, had the two vessels come together, the Spanish captain had determined to risk it, feeling that the lugger would be the sufferer, and his rage was fearful when he saw how he had been avoided by the pirate's masterly seamanship.

His schooner having swung entirely up into the wind, it was some time before she could be gotten under way again, and in full chase.

This delay Don Diablo had quickly taken advantage of, for having run a few lengths with the wind on his starboard quarter, he suddenly squared away directly before the wind, and was nearly a quarter of a mile off, and fairly flying over the waves, ere the Spaniard could again bring his guns to bear on him.

Getting out from under the land's lee, and also in deeper water, the wind blew fiercer, and the waves ran higher, both of which favored the pirate craft, as the fire of the Spaniard flew wild, and the speed of the schooner was slow in comparison with the fast-sailing lugger.

But the Spanish captain held on in pursuit, with all sail set, and, as long as his guns could throw a shot in the vicinage of the lugger, he kept them at work, though the gunners worked moodily, having become firmly convinced that his Satanic majesty did indeed command the fleet vessel so swiftly disappearing from their view over the moonlit waters, and seemingly unharmed by the fiery gantlet through which it had passed.

But hardly had the lugger run the schooner out of sight, when the gray of morning settled upon the sea, and in the dim light a sail was visible.

Eagerly Don Diablo glanced through his glass at the stranger, and then said, while a puzzled expression crossed his face:

"Anton, that is Don Isadoro's *goleta*, El Saltador, or I am greatly mistaken."

Anton took the glass and after a close scrutiny said:

"You are right, señor captain, it is El Saltador."

"Who has dared disobey my orders, for I ordered the *goleta* to the rendezvous," said the chief, with an angry flash in his eyes.

"She may have been captured, captain, and be now under another flag."

"True, that might be; we shall see as soon as the sun rises and we can make out her colors."

Eagerly all watched the *goleta*, which was a league distant, and tacking against the wind, as if to seek a closer view of the lugger.

"There she flies, señor!" cried Anton, as the flag of the *goleta* went up to the peak.

"*Nombre de Dios!* she has been captured," cried Don Diablo, as the yellow and red flag of Spain went up to the peak of the *goleta*.

"And we will have to run for it, señor?"

"Yes, for there comes the Spanish schooner astern, good Anton, the land lies on our starboard here, and that *goleta* is, as we all know, as fleet as the wind."

"The chances are against us, señor chief?"

"Yes, Señor Anton; but the greater the danger the more enjoyable is it to me," and Don Diablo smiled as pleasantly as though danger was something to be sought after rather than dreaded.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GOLETA AND THE LUGGER.

HAVING determined upon his course, Don Diablo immediately headed along the shore with the wind aft, and the fleet lugger went flying through the waters as though she fully realized her danger.

Having discovered the *goleta*, and also seen her set the Spanish flag, the captain of the schooner, Don Isadoro Sabinas, and the others on board, gave a loud cheer, for they felt that the lugger must now be taken, as there was but one chance of escape, and that was to outrun the El Saltador, which they were confident she could not do, even if driven by Don Diablo.

But the joy of those on the Spanish schooner, which was some six miles astern of the lugger, was suddenly changed to grief at beholding the pirate, after continuing his flight along the shore for a short distance, deliberately change his course and head directly for the *goleta*.

The cause of this strange maneuver was at once discerned by a glance at the *goleta*, which had abruptly lowered the flag of Spain from her peak, and raised in its stead a huge sable

field, in the center of which gleamed a burning eye.

This strange flag was also seen by those on the lugger as soon as its dark folds caught the breeze, and a wild cheer broke from the pirates, as Don Diablo cried:

"Behold! it is the wreckers' flag!"

Instantly his course was changed, and half an hour after those on the Spanish schooner had the mortification of seeing the two fleet vessels lying near together, and a boat passing from the *goleta* to the lugger.

In that boat Don Diablo saw, for he was attentively watching its approach, one who brought a flush to his cheek and then left it pale.

Instantly, with the quickness with which he always acted in moments of danger, he said:

"Señor Anton, hail yonder boat and tell it to return to the *goleta*."

"Say also that I will come on board El Saltador."

"Sí, señor."

"And you, Señor Anton, take command of this lugger and follow in my wake."

"Sí, señor," and, as Don Diablo entered the lugger's cabin Anton obeyed the command given him, and a voice answered from the boat:

"But I would see the chief."

"He will board the *goleta* immediately."

Somewhat reluctantly the boat put back for the *goleta*, while Anton ordered the lugger's cutter lowered and manned.

In the mean time Don Diablo had entered the cabin, where he found Nita Sabinas reclining upon a lounge, and Alena the octoroon seated by her side.

"Nita, my sweet one, I will have to leave you now," he said, softly.

"Leave me?" and she sprang up in alarm.

"Be still, silly child, for I only go on board the *goleta*, which I took from your brother, you remember."

"Yes, Alena told me she was in sight, but my shoulder is painful, and I cared not to move," she answered, languidly.

"There is some business for me to settle on board, and as we are near the island rendezvous, I will remain on the *goleta* until we reach there."

"And the lugger, Nevil?"

"Will follow close in my wake, so do not get blue, for we'll drop the schooner out of sight in a few hours, and then run for the rendezvous."

Nita made no reply, and Don Diablo bade her farewell and departed for the *goleta*.

As he stepped on deck he gave the order to get under way at once, for the Spanish schooner was slipping up on the two vessels rapidly during their stop, and almost immediately the *goleta*, with the lugger following, were stretching away out into the Caribbean Sea.

"Well, señor, when am I to be taken notice of?"

The speaker was the one who had been in the stern-sheets of the boat that was on its way to the lugger when turned back by Don Diablo's order, and he approached the chief as he walked aft, upon seeing the two vessels under way.

At the question he turned quickly, and said, in his pleasant way:

"Well, Alma, what lucky breeze has blown you on board this *goleta*?"

The person addressed answered quietly:

"An unlucky breeze, señor, for the rendezvous has been taken, the cabins are in ashes, and those of the League who are not dead, are in irons on an American frigate, excepting half a dozen who escaped with me."

"By the cross! but you bring cheerful tidings, Alma," cried Don Diablo, in an angry tone.

"Yes, Don, it seems as if your star of destiny was going rapidly down in gloom," was the significant reply.

"There your red lips speak falsely, Alma; but come with me into the cabin and let me know all that has occurred, and why I find you thus masquerading?"

Don Diablo led the way into the *goleta*'s luxurious cabin, and throwing aside his hat and belt of arms began to pace to and fro, while his companion sunk down upon a velvet divan and attentively regarded him.

At a glance it was evident that the disguise of a man hid the beautiful form of a woman, for, also removing the cap she wore, a wealth of red-gold hair fell from its fastenings and dropped around her like a veil.

The face of the woman was young, beautiful, and yet marred by a certain look of recklessness and lack of honor; for, let a woman commit a heinous crime, and almost indelibly is its impress left upon her face.

Men may sin day after day and their faces hide the villainess of their hearts; but when a woman has once fallen from grace and lives a life of hidden sin, its stamp upon her face she cannot hide.

But I forget that I have gone to moralizing, when I am writing a sea story of over half a century ago, in the days of piracy upon the high seas.

The face of Alma was beautiful, in spite of the wicked look resting upon it, and her form was exquisitely molded, slightly above the aver-

age hight, and willowy and graceful in every motion.

She was dressed in a sailor suit, and wore it as though not unaccustomed to man's attire.

Her eyes were intensely black, and restless, her brows dark and curving, and her hair, as I have said before, a golden red, forming a strong contrast to her eyes and rich complexion.

For an instant or two, after entering the cabin, neither the chief or his fair visitor spoke, and the silence seemed to embarrass the man, for he gave his head an angry toss, and said:

"I am waiting to hear your story, Alma?"

"And I am waiting, Don Diablo, to know if this is the greeting you extend to me after a separation of months."

"Pardon me, Alma, but I was worried with the vexations upon me; and, besides, your suit, I think, kept me aloof," and with a smile the chief bent over and kissed the woman on the lips.

But yet she seemed not satisfied, for without returning the kiss she asked:

"Are you tiring of me, Reno Quesala?"

"Nonsense, Alma, don't be silly."

"I am not silly, señor; but let us discuss that which is more agreeable to you than love-making seems to be of late."

"You have lost your vessel I believe?"

"Yes, she was crippled badly by a Spanish cruiser, and I set her on fire and escaped to the Florida coast in my boats."

"And lost your treasures that had cost so much blood to gain?"

"The greater part, yes; the balance that I could not take, I divided with my men."

"And could you not get another vessel?"

"Yes, I have a plan on foot to get possession of a splendid craft, and shall soon know if it is successful; but to keep afloat I captured a small American schooner, and it was wrecked in a tornado and all on board, excepting myself, lost."

"Ah! your namesake never deserts you in danger or distress," said the woman, with a sneer.

"No, the devil certainly protects me," was said in the same tone as that in which the woman had spoken.

"Where were you wrecked?" asked Alma, after a pause.

"On this coast, some leagues from here."

"And how, without a crew, did you get possession of this *goleta* and yonder lugger, that holds her own so well with her?"

"Alma, it is for me to question, not you," was the angry retort.

"As you please; I merely questioned, as you seemed not to wish to inquire of me what has happened at your stronghold," was the indifferent reply.

"You say it was attacked by an American cruiser?"

"Yes."

"And demolished?"

"Utterly."

"How did the vessel get into the bay?"

"By the channel."

"Of course; but who was her pilot?"

"Ramirez, your lieutenant."

"Ha! By the Virgin! but he shall swing for this."

"It is catching before hanging, señor chief."

"He has fled then?"

"He certainly is no fool."

"Go where he will I will yet hunt him down for this treachery," and had Ramirez, the traitor lieutenant, caught sight of his chief then he certainly would have felt that were he in his power nothing on earth could save him from a fearful fate.

CHAPTER XX.

ALMA'S STORY.

So thoroughly incensed was Don Diablo at the treachery of the man he had trusted, that he paced the cabin in silence, his lips set, his eyes burning for revenge and his hands clinched.

It was seldom that Alma had seen him so deeply moved, and to break in upon his towering rage, that she felt would break forth in some ungovernable act, it would be madness to attempt to quell, she said, pleasantly:

"What care you for the loss of the stronghold, when you have other places to seek, and two such vessels, as are this *goleta* and yonder lugger?"

"True, they are the means for obtaining something better, and there is a rendezvous, or retreat, I have long thought of going to, and which will be better than the old one."

Almost like magic his manner had changed, and the storm of rage swept over.

Seeing it had passed the woman asked:

"Had you done aught to wrong Ramirez?"

"No, other than trust him, which I should never do, knowing the frailties of man's nature."

"Judging from your own failings?" she said, with a sneer.

"Yes, judging from my own nature, I should trust no man."

"Nor woman?"

"Ay, Alma, nor woman, too," he said, bitterly.

"You do not trust me, then?"

"Yes, in your love for me and truth to me."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the woman.

"Why do you laugh?" he asked, angrily.

"Don Diablo, I have for some time felt that you were tired of me and wished that you could not trust me."

"This is nonsense, Alma."

"It is not nonsense, señor, as I can prove."

"You knew that your Lieutenant Ramirez loved me, or professed to, and you left him at the stronghold when you sailed on your last cruise, hoping he would win me from you—"

"Alma, I—"

"No excuse, señor, for your spy set on me betrayed you to me, and—"

"He shall die for his treachery," hissed the chief.

"He is beyond your reach, Don Diablo, for he is already dead; he fell fighting the American sailors to aid my escape from the island."

"He lied to you, Alma; I did not set Martinez upon you as a spy."

"You lie, Don Diablo, for I know that you did."

"Well, on that account you were not untrue to me," sneered the man.

"No, but my truth to you cost you your stronghold."

The chief laughed doubtfully.

"I tell you that which is true."

"Prove it."

"Ramirez told me of his love and begged me to fly with him, and that he would live a different life."

"He had jewels sufficient to turn into a fortune, and said that you did not love me, and that he would make me his wife, while you had dragged me down to a life of shame."

"He pleaded well," was the scornful remark.

"Yes, but he pleaded in vain, for I drove him from my presence, and he left, swearing revenge upon both you and I."

"That night he left the stronghold in a small polacca alone, and when next I saw him he stood at the wheel of the American cruiser, running her into the island bay."

"Well, he got his revenge against me."

"He got more, for the United States Government pardoned him for his valuable services and made him a seaman, I heard from a wounded sailor we captured."

"Bah! he will return to piracy."

"He may, but he has ruined you."

"Why, Alma, you talk like a child; he led the Americans to capture a stronghold I have long thought of giving up, and they gained thereby some dozen old guns, burned a few cabins, destroying some small polaccas, and killed, or took as prisoners, some four-score men."

"Granted that he had this revenge on me, and for what I don't know, where was his vengeance against you?"

"Ah! he intended to capture me, too, and then have the cruiser wait in the bay for your return and seize you and your vessel."

"Had he succeeded in this, he would indeed have had his revenge."

"But he did not succeed, as I put to sea in an open boat, though we had to fight to reach the shore, and night coming on aided us."

"Who, besides yourself?" quickly asked the chief.

"Martinez, your spy; but he was slain, and the one who killed him I shot, and one of my followers dragged him on board the boat; but he died before morning."

"And who came with you, I asked?"

"Half a dozen of your best men; but we would have been taken again had not we spied the *goleta* running in, and recognized on her decks familiar faces."

"We hailed her, she stood toward us, and we were picked up, just as the American cruiser, piloted by Ramirez, was coming in chase of us."

"Telling what had happened to the officer in command of the *goleta*, he set all sail and we escaped from the cruiser and headed for the Red Lagoon, where he said he had left you in the lugger of Conrado Marial, which several times I have seen at the stronghold."

"Now tell me, Don Diablo, how it is I find Señor Victorio Nunez and a score of your men with the *goleta*, when you said all on the American vessel, which you captured, were wrecked, excepting yourself?"

As Alma asked the question it was evident that she felt suspicion that Don Diablo had spoken falsely to her, and she fixed her eyes upon him with a look that was dangerous, from the glitter in them.

CHAPTER XXI.

JEALOUSY.

THE implied jealous suspicion in the mind of Alma might, at another time, have passed unheeded by the chief; but his guilty conscience was quick to note her words, and believing that she might, in some way, have gleaned the real truth of his meeting Nita Sabinas, he said with apparent frankness:

"Alma, don't be suspicious of me without a cause."

"When I was wrecked on the Cuban coast, I certainly could not tell those who rescued me—"

"Who rescued you, Reno Quesala?" asked the woman, quietly.

"Why, I was dragged from the surf by the servants of a wealthy planter and carried to his hacienda with a broken arm and nearer dead than alive."

"Of course I could not say who I was, and, as particles of the wreck proved what vessel it was that went ashore, I took the name of her captain, which was Austin Aubrey—"

"Austin Aubrey!" cried the woman, springing to her feet, her face pale as a corpse.

"Yes; do you know the name?"

"Know the name?" she asked, with suppressed passion in her tone.

"Yes."

"Reno Quesala, did you take the life of Austin Aubrey?"

She looked at him in a way that made him tremble, brave man that he was.

"No."

"Do you speak the truth?"

"I do."

"You captured his vessel?"

"Yes."

"Where was Austin Aubrey?"

"Ashore, with a number of his men and nearly all of his officers; the one in charge was a midshipman."

"His name?" she said, imperatively.

"Guy Stanhope."

"I do not know him."

"Well, who is this Austin Aubrey?"

"A captain in the United States navy."

"That I know; but what is he to you?"

"My brother."

"Your brother?"

"Yes."

"By Heaven! I believe you are right, for I remember now your name is Alma Aubrey."

"True; I was going on the clipper ship, which was overhauled by the pirate Ricardo, to join my brother in New Orleans."

"After a fierce fight with your rival, Ricardo, you captured his vessel, and I was saved by him to fall into your hands, Don Diablo."

"I was a foolish, romantic school-girl then, just out of boarding-school, and my head was full of handsome buccaneers, and you were my ideal rover, and, being kind to me, mistaking your devilry for love, I loved you devotedly, and was easily led by you into what I then believed was a marriage, but which I now know was performed by one of your crew rigged out as a padre."

"So be it, Don Diablo; you made a fool of me, and I need not complain of my lot; only, if I believed you had harmed my noble brother I would kill you, so help me Heaven!"

There was no doubting that she meant what she said, and the chief knew it.

But his face was emotionless, as he said:

"I did not kill your brother, Alma, and the facts are as I told you."

"I rejoice to hear it; now tell me how you left the hacienda, where you were so long the guest?"

"Well, I wrote to Havana to Conrado El Saltador, whom I knew then only as one of the League, but whom I have since learned was the famous conspirator El Saltador, whom—"

"Yes, I have heard of him; well?"

"I sent a letter by one of Don Isadoro's crew—"

"Don Isadoro who?"

"You are strangely inquisitive, Alma?"

"It is my interest in you, Reno; but who was this Don?"

"Isadoro Sabinas."

"Well?"

"One of his crew, for he owns his yacht, or rather did, as this is the craft, I recognized as a man who had served with me, and he carried my letter to Conrado Marial, asking him to come in his lugger for me."

"And he did so?"

"Yes."

"And he brought your men with him?"

"Yes, he knew that I had a number of men on secret service in Havana, and his crew being short he took them."

"Well?"

"That is all, Alma."

"All there is to tell, or all you care to tell?"

"All I have to tell."

"Think!"

"Curse you, girl, what ails you?" said the chief, angrily.

"Nothing; it is you, Don Diablo, not I, that has an ailment."

"What do you mean?"

"Has Don Isadoro a daughter?"

"No."

"What?"

He saw her dangerous eyes glitter, and knowing how far she was acquainted with all that had happened at the Villa del Florida, he said, forming his decision how to act with his usual promptitude:

"No, Alma, Don Isadoro has no daughter, but he has a sister."

"A sister?"

"Yes."

"Ah!"

Driven on by her manner he continued:

"It is of her that I wish to speak to you, for I owe my escape to her."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; I was recognized the very day Conrado arrived in his lugger, and Don Isodoro and his friends attempted to make me prisoner, when I seized his sister, and threatening to kill her if I was attacked, escaped to the lugger."

"Ah!"

It was a sigh of relief from the woman, and the hardness of her features somewhat relaxed, and Don Diablo continued:

"She is now in my power; but as her father so kindly cared for me in my illness I do not wish to have harm befall her, and yet I know not how to return her to her home."

"I can arrange that for you, Reno."

"You, Alma?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Let me go on board the lugger with a few men only and take her to her home, while you continue on in the *goleta* to the island you intend to make your rendezvous, and there I will join you."

"It is the Wreckers' Isle in the Bahamas, Alma; but I cannot consent to your doing what you ask; but your suggestion brings to my mind an idea that I can run to the lugger, and after landing the Señorita Sabinas come on and join you at the Wreckers' Island."

"Will you do this, Reno?"

"Yes."

"Can I trust you?"

"Yes."

The woman seemed lost in painful thought for a moment, and then she said, and her words were earnest:

"Reno, without meaning any wrong to you, some of the crew of the *goleta* told me of your wreck and escape through the Señorita Sabinas, and you have frankly confirmed their words, so I will trust you; but answer me one question?"

"We I, Alma?"

"Is this señorita beautiful?"

"Yes, Alma."

"Do you love her?"

"Why, silly child, loving you as I do, how could another win my love?" and he bent over and kissed her, while she whispered:

"Thank you, Reno; but if I thought you could learn to love her I would kill her."

"Why, Alma!" he said, with a start.

"Yes, Reno, and if I thought you cared for her now, I would kill you."

A few moments after the Spanish schooner's captain and his guests were surprised to see the *goleta* and lugger luff up into the wind and lay to.

Then a boat passed from the *goleta* to the lugger and back again, and the Spaniards were the more puzzled to see the two vessels get under way again and stand off in different directions from each other.

And the puzzle they could not solve, any more than they could which craft carried Don Diablo and Nita Sabinas, for the schooner was not a match for either vessel, and with sorrowful hearts they were compelled to give up the chase and head for Havana, where Don Isodoro swore he would secure a fleet cruiser and search the seas over to run down Don Diablo.

CHAPTER XXII.

UNDER FALSE COLORS.

SEVERAL days after the parting of the *goleta* and lugger, a vessel of the latter class, but a clumsily rigged craft, with high stern and bulwarks, and wearing a look of having been severely weather-beaten, put slowly into the port of Havana.

The officers and sentinels on duty on the Moro Castle simply glanced at her as she sailed below them, considering her some coffee or sugar drogher unworthy of notice, with her dingy hull, chocolate-colored, and severely patched sails, and half-Indian, half-negro crew.

But had they taken a really close look, they might have seen that in spite of her clumsy appearance she possessed certain trim lines, and carried strangely large spars and tall masts for a mere plantation trading vessel.

Upon the decks were several negro seamen and Indians, the latter half-breed descendants from the noble tribes that once inhabited and ruled the West India islands.

At the helm was a white man, heavily bearded, and standing near, gazing over the high bulwarks at the grand but gloomy Moro Castle and fortress, was a youth, dressed, like his older companion, in rough sailor garb.

Running close inshore, toward the lower part of the city, the drogher dropped anchor between two vessels, the outline and beauty of which made her appear even more homely.

One of those vessels was the Spanish schooner that had been compelled to give up the chase of both the *goleta* and lugger, and the other was also a schooner, but one of such superb symmetry in hull and rigging as to attract the attention of the seamen of all other vessels anchored near.

At her peak hung the American flag, and her open ports and frowning guns showed that she was armed, though her crew seemed strangely small in numbers, as only a score of men were visible on board.

The beauty of her hull and rig at once riveted the gaze of the helmsman, and apparent commander of the drogher, and he gazed with undisguised admiration, and evidently with the eye of a thorough seaman, at the vessel.

From the exceedingly long and very narrow hull, with its razor-like bows, up to the remarkably tall, slender masts, that had a most saucy rake to them, he looked with evident satisfaction, after which his eyes fell upon the armament of five guns, brass twelves, to a broadside, and two heavy pivot guns, a thirty-two fore and aft; next he took in the circle of muskets and cutlasses around the masts, and the glittering rows of boarding pikes along the bulwarks.

Calling the youth to his side he said something to him in a low tone, and then the two, after looking for a few moments at the beautiful vessel, went into the drogher's waist and passed over the bulwark into a shore boat one of the crew had hailed for his skipper.

Landing at a deserted quay the two wended their way along the harbor street until they came to a part of the city almost wholly given up to sailors' boarding-houses and *pulperias*, or Spanish wine-shops.

Approaching one of these they were about to enter when a man in sailor's uniform stepped up to the drogher's skipper and said in a low tone:

"The disguise is all right, captain, but that princely walk of yours does not become the garb."

Instantly the skipper's hand dropped on a knife in the red sash he wore; but apparently recognizing the speaker he said quickly:

"Ah! is it you, Señor Campas?"

"Yes, my dear captain, wholly at your service," was the reply of the handsome young sailor.

"How in the name of the saints did you recognize me?"

"By your walk and form, señor, as I also recognize that the pretty clipper sailing in your company would look better in petticoats than—"

"Hold! Señor Campas, not a word more," was the stern reply.

"As you please, Don Diablo; but come, let us enter Vigne's *pulperia*, as this is no safe place for a man to stand who has a magnificently generous price set on his head," and with a light laugh the young sailor led the way into a side-door of a Spanish wine-shop and the disguised pirate chief and his comrade quickly followed him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SUSPECTED.

It was an hour previous to the meeting in the streets of Havana of Don Diablo in disguise, accompanied by his youthful companion, with the seaman he had addressed as Señor Campas, that the latter person was rambling along through the more fashionable part of the city than that of the *pulperia* quarter, when he passed three gentlemen whose appearance could not fail to attract his attention.

One was a dark-faced Spanish officer of thirty, clad in the full attire of a major of cavalry; the second was evidently a Cuban, and wore a sailor suit of handsome cloth, while the third was in the undress uniform of an American midshipman.

As the young sailor met the three he gave a slight start when his eyes fell upon the Spanish officer; but, recovering himself immediately, was passing on when the eye of the Spaniard fell upon him, and he too gave a start of evident recognition.

Half-halting, he gave vent to an exclamation, and said to his companions, in earnest tones:

"Do you see that man yonder, señors?"

They both replied in the affirmative.

"Well, if I mistake not, he is a noted conspirator."

"He wears the suit, Major Alvarado, of an American sailor," averred the one in midshipman's uniform.

"That may be, Señor Stanhope; but I feel convinced he is none other than Caliente, the young conspirator."

"I have heard of him, and believe he was to have been garroted but escaped in some way," remarked the Cuban, whom the reader will recognize as Don Isodoro Sabinas, though his handsome face was full of sorrow, and looked haggard and stern.

"Yes, he is one and the same, and as we have reported to the Governor-General, and must await his decision, Sabinas, as to your going to sea in an armed cruiser, let us hasten on after the fellow, and if he be the one I believe him to be I will arrest him."

"How will you know, major?" asked Don Isodoro.

"I'll request our friend here, Midshipman Stanhope, to address him in his native tongue; if the man speaks English perfectly I am mistaken, as Caliente is a Cuban and I think knows no other language; will you thus oblige me, Señor Stanhope?"

The midshipman readily consented and the three hastened on after the young sailor, who never quickened his pace, though he evidently saw their approach and knew that he had been the subject of conversation.

"Ho, lad, to what vessel do you belong that flies the stars and stripes?" called out Guy Stanhope, as they came near.

The man addressed quickly turned, and, at seeing a commissioned officer politely saluted, and answered:

"To the American schooner-of-war Wizard, sir," was the prompt reply, and in English that certainly had an accent.

"She lies at anchor in the harbor, having run in here for stores, I believe?" continued the midshipman.

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you ship in her?"

"In Baltimore, sir, where she was built," and the suspected man looked the young American officer squarely in the face.

"Thank you, my lad," and Guy Stanhope turned away, a strange look upon his face, and said to the Spanish officer:

"Well, señor, the man speaks English as you heard."

"Yes, señor, and I thank you; but I still doubt him, and if you will pardon me for leaving you I will follow him, for upon his head there is a large reward that will help me out of debt, if he be Caliente, the conspirator."

"Certainly, señor, but I warn you not to trouble him if he prove an American, and I will say good-by, for I will report to the captain of the Wizard, it being the only vessel of my nation in port, and I see not how I can serve Spain or Don Isodoro further."

Both the Spaniard and Cuban seemed loth to give the young midshipman up; but Major Alvarado was so earnest in his pursuit of the sailor he suspected, that he bade Guy Stanhope a hasty farewell, and promising to see Don Isodoro again at the Palacio, sprung into a passing *volante* and ordered the driver to keep the suspicious seaman in sight.

A moment after Don Isodoro parted with the American, after thanking him for what he had done to aid him in the rescue of his sister, and once more at liberty Guy Stanhope walked rapidly down toward the quay, muttering to himself:

"By Neptune! but that sharp-eyed Spanish major is right, for that man is Campas Caliente, who saved my life in this very town two years ago, when an assassin attacked me; but I would not betray him for the world."

"What he is doing in Havana now, and in an American seaman's garb, I would like to know."

"Well, I only hope he will throw that major off his track."

So saying the lively young midshipman continued on his way to the quay, and soon after was on board the beautiful American schooner, where, to his delight, he knew her commander and received a most cordial welcome.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A GENEROUS FOE.

BENT upon running his game to cover, for Major Alvarado still believed the man in the dress of an American sailor to be Caliente, the conspirator, the Spaniard slowly followed him in the *volante*, unseen by the one he watched, though keeping him constantly in sight.

The secret of his dogging the sailor's steps he had unintentionally betrayed when he spoke of the high price set on the Cuban's head as a revolutionist, for being a fast man, and a card-player, Major Enrique Alvarado was deeply in debt.

The capture of Caliente would pay those debts and give him a handsome sum left over in hand.

But he would not make a mistake in his man, as he wore the dress of an American seaman, and had been recognized as such by an officer of the United States navy.

Still he would never give up the trail until he was certain one way or the other.

As the sailor, after glancing up and down the streets, apparently to see if he was watched, took his way to the quarter of Spanish wine-shops, the hopes of Major Alvarado arose; and when he saw him turn into Vigne's *pulperia*, a place long under suspicion, he was positively happy, and called out to the driver to drop him at the first sailors' clothing store he could find.

A shop of this kind was close at hand, and the major sprung out, dismissed his *volante*, and entered the dingy place.

Ten minutes after a man came out in sailor garb, and few would have believed that beneath the red and blue striped woolen shirt, red skull-cap, and white canvas pants, was the dashing aide to the Governor-General of Cuba.

But it was so, for he had put his new purchases on over his uniform, and hidden his hat in the folds of his sash.

With an assumed slouching gait the approached the *pulperia* he had seen the young seaman enter, and walked boldly in.

It was a wine-shop of the lower class, and a score of men were seated at the tables drinking red Spanish wine, and smoking cigarritos made of the commonest kind of tobacco.

At first he believed the seaman had escaped him; but presently he espied him at a table in

the corner, a bottle of wine in front of him, and a cigar between his teeth.

With his assumed walk he approached the table, and dropping down into a chair, said in a maudlin tone:

"Señor, drink a glass with an old friend, won't you?"

"I do not know you, señor," was the quiet reply.

"But I want to know you, señor, for I like your people; wish I was an American myself."

At this the seaman took a second glance at the speaker who had forced himself upon him, and there flashed in his eyes a quick glance of recognition.

But not a muscle quivered, as he said with a light laugh:

"Well, señor, as you like Americans, and are pressing in your invitation, I'll drink with you."

"All right; call for the best in the shop."

The wine was called for, and evidently knowing the young seaman, Vique brought a far different kind from the villainous stuff he served to his ordinary guests, and the Spaniard paid the score from a well-filled purse.

"You speak Spanish like a native, señor," said Major Alvarado, after they had drunk a glass together.

"I am a native of this island," was the quiet reply.

The major started, for he was now certain of his man, and said in his maudlin way:

"You remind me of a poor fellow I met some years ago, and whom I deeply pitied, for I was half his way of thinking."

"Who was he, señor?" indifferently asked the seaman.

"Campas Caliente was his name."

"He conspired, with others, I believe, to free Cuba from Spain; but was captured and sentenced to be garroted."

"That is the man; poor fellow, I would give much to see him now, for I have good news for men of that stripe."

"Indeed! then your wish can be gratified, for, señor, I am *Culiente, the Conspirator*."

"And you are my prisoner," was the suppressed words, as the major drew from his bosom a pistol and leveled it directly at the heart of the Cuban.

A light laugh broke from the lips of Campas Caliente, and in an easy way he said:

"Why, Major Enrique Alvarado, you have overreached yourself in dogging my steps, for you have but to see that this table sets back in an alcove, and glance upon either side of you to observe the slightest movement on your part will be the signal for your death."

The horrified Spaniard did glance to the left and then to the right, and he turned pallid at what he saw there.

And no wonder, for a sliding panel in each wall had been pushed aside, and from them appeared two hands holding pistols almost in touching distance of his head.

"What means this outrage upon an officer of the crown?"

"Ho! good men and true! to the rescue!" and Major Alvarado wheeled toward the saloon to summon aid from those present.

But with horror he saw but a blank wall before him, as a large sliding door had noiselessly closed up the entrance to the alcove.

"Major Alvarado, your voice can never be heard by those without, so sit down and hear me," said the seaman, sternly.

Involuntarily the major sunk into his chair, all his vision of blood-money fading from his view.

"You did all you could some years ago, when, as a boy, I was led into a conspiracy, to have me garroted."

"You captured me in my own house, and your act broke my poor mother's heart, and she died, never seeing me again."

"Her death I lay upon you."

"Again, when I might have been cleared by the Junta that tried me, you urged them to pass sentence of death upon me; but I escaped that doom and fled to America."

"Now you have tracked me here, and in doing so have discovered secrets that no man unless he be a member of the League, must know and live."

"To save your life I have no power; but to show you that I do not willfully put you to death, I will give you a chance for your life."

"In the name of the Virgin! what is it?" asked the terrified man, for he felt that his love of blood-money had led him perhaps to death.

"I will go, with others, into the tribunal hall, on the floor above this, and will meet you with either sword or pistol."

"If you kill me, I pledge you that you shall be set at liberty one week from to day."

"If I kill you, then shall I be revenged, and not one of your friends shall ever learn aught of your fate."

"You spoke of a League; may I not join it?" eagerly asked the Spaniard, grasping like a drowning man at a straw.

"No, for no man who is Spanish born will be admitted."

"Come, Major Alvarado, go with me, and

don't prove yourself a coward as well as a villain."

The words of the young Cuban aroused the Spaniard's spirit, and springing to his feet he cried, sternly:

"Lead on where you choose; I will follow."

Along a passageway, lighted by a taper, although it was bright daylight, the Cuban led the Spaniard; then up a pair of stairs, that gave back no sound to their steps, and into a large room, the walls of which were thickly padded, and were not broken by windows.

Several tapers were burning at one end of the room upon a table, around which several men were seated.

Glancing up they seemed surprised at the appearance of the Spanish officer, but the seaman said, quietly:

"It is Major Enrique Alvarado, my foe, señors."

"He dogged my steps here in disguise, and I have promised if he kill me with either pistol or blade, he may go free one week from this."

"If I kill him, I will have taken a load from off my heart."

"You may well promise that, Señor Campas," said one of the men, and the others smiled.

"I am ready, señor," and the seaman turned to the Spaniard.

"One minute, please," and Major Alvarado hastily disrobed himself of his disguise, and stood awaiting in his uniform.

"What weapons do you prefer, Major Alvarado?" politely asked the Cuban.

The Spaniard was a superb swordsman, and readily answered:

"Swords!"

"As you please, señor major; take your choice of these," and the Cuban laid a dozen upon the table.

The major, after a careful scrutiny, selected the one that suited him, and Campas Caliente took up its match, and the two men faced each other.

From the first the Cuban was calm, almost to indifference; but the Spaniard was nervous and very pale, yet fought with consummate skill.

A few passes, a few parries and thrusts, and the combat ended, for Major Enrique Alvarado sunk upon the floor with the blade of Campas Caliente in his heart.

Without glancing even at the man he had slain the young Cuban left the room, and then the *pulperia*, to come upon Don Diablo and a youth in disguise, and lead them back into the wine-shop.

Ten minutes after his departure from the Tribunal Hall he reentered it, accompanied by Don Diablo and his young companion.

Instantly the eyes of the latter fell upon the prostrate form of the Spaniard, still lying where it had fallen, while the half-dozen men at the table were conversing as busily as before the fatal interruption, apparently unmindful of the presence of death in their midst.

With an exclamation of horror the youth started back, crying:

"It is the body of Major Alvarado, the very man my brother wished me to marry."

"Yes, it was Major Enrique Alvarado, but he is dead now, for I killed him in a *duello* a short while since," was the unmoved response of Campas Caliente.

CHAPTER XXV.

A PLOT FOR A PRIZE.

WHEN Don Diablo entered the Tribunal Hall there was an instant hush among the men at the table; their low, earnest conversation ceased, and all arose, for Campas had remarked:

"*Camaradas*, here is the chief, our Bird of Paradise in the plumage of a common sea-gull; but come as he may he is welcome."

"Welcome, señor chief," said the others, in chorus, though there was that in their manner that showed their welcome was from a wholesome respect of the man, rather than love of him.

"My young lieutenant, the Señor Florida, señors," said Don Diablo, by way of introducing his young companion, and then turning to Campas Caliente he continued:

"Well, señor, what has been done in the matter agreed upon when last we met in New Orleans?"

"I am here in the garb of an American seaman, you notice, chief?" answered the young man.

"Yes."

"The vessel of which I am boatswain lies at anchor in the harbor."

"And what vessel is it?"

"An American schooner."

"Has anchored near the Spanish schooner that lies off the old stone fort?" asked the chief, quickly.

"The same, Don Diablo; she is known as the Wizard."

"I saw the craft, and never in my life did I behold such symmetry of hull and rig; she should fly like a hurricane, Campas," said Don Diablo, with enthusiasm.

"She can fly like the hurricane, señor chief, and stand up in a gale like a ship of the line."

"But she is an American, and—"

"Señor chief, I am not one to wish to do harm to an American vessel; the schooner was built in Baltimore, and armed in Washington, but she is for the Mexican government."

"Ha!"

"Yes, señor, and through courtesy, the Americans detailed three officers and twenty men to carry her to Vera Cruz."

"A small crew."

"No larger than a mere working one was needed, for she was not intended to fight, only to run, until she reached her destination."

"True, and why did she come in here?"

"To bring dispatches to any American cruiser that might be here that Don Diablo, the noted pirate, had not gone down with his vessel, destroyed off the Florida coast, but had captured a United States schooner-of-war, and was again at sea."

"Ah! well, that craft has also gone down, and I am here in a trim, swift-sailing lugger, so thoroughly disguised in hull and rig, that she lies within half a cable's-length of a Spanish schooner that has chased us for several days."

"You are too reckless, chief, I fear."

"Oh, no! I take big chances, but they turn out well; when I slip up, I am ready to take my fall; but, tell me, what is your plan regarding the schooner?"

"When I discovered this beautiful craft, and learned she was for the Mexicans, I did not look further, or attempt to have one built, but slipped on board of her, and here I am."

"And your plan?"

"Well, señor, knowing that Vera Cruz was her destination, I sent half a hundred fine fellows, whom I knew of in New York, to Vera Cruz."

"You sent them there?"

"I wrote at once to Monsieur Vidocq there, telling him to send the lads, by various vessels, at once to Vera Cruz, and have them there ready to ship on board of an armed schooner that would come in and then fly the Mexican flag."

"The Mexican Government likes American sailors, and most of them are such, the others being Gulf seamen from various lands."

"Principally pirates, you mean, Campas?" said Don Diablo, with a smile.

"Wholly pirates, señor chief."

"Well?"

"The men now in the schooner are my cattle; that is, I shipped them, and these will make seventy, and she needs a complement of a hundred for heavy work."

"I have the balance."

"When the Mexicans get her from the officer now in charge, her crew can take her from the Mexicans, and—"

"By the Cross! Campas Caliente, you have conceived a noble plot to win a prize, and you go as my first lieutenant," said Don Diablo.

"Thanks, señor chief."

"I ran in here to see what I could get in the way of a large vessel, for though I have two, they are not large enough, and there are faster vessels afloat, and you know, Campas, I must have the fleetest craft that sails the seas."

"It is very necessary, señor chief."

"When do you sail, Señor Campas?"

"To-morrow, as the schooner awaits an American cruiser expected in."

"Good! I'll sail to-night and reach Vera Cruz ahead of you."

"You must have a fast vessel to do that, señor."

"She is fast; now I have business to call me elsewhere, and after dark I shall run out; Vique!"

"Señor chief," and one of the men at the table arose and faced Don Diablo.

"I wish a dozen good men."

"You can have them, señor."

"Send them out in a fishing shallop to meet me as I run out."

"I am in a lugger, with lofty stern and high bulwarks, and sails patched, so they will know her if I sail before dark; if after night, I will show the Wreckers' light."

"Si, señor; you have lost heavily in men of late," said the man addressed as Vique.

"True, and in vessels, too."

"The Señor Conrado Marial reached you in safety, I hope, for I gave him your message?"

"Yes, and in time to save me from a bad scrape; but, poor fellow, he was knocked overboard by a shot from a Spanish schooner that chased us."

"And killed?" cried every voice.

"Yes, he went to the bottom, poor fellow."

The men exchanged glances with each other, and Vique said, earnestly:

"Don Diablo, you did not know, for the secret was well kept by the few who held it, that Conrado Marial was Estevan El Saltador?"

"Yes, he made known the fact to me," was the ready reply.

"Ah, señors, his is a sad loss to us; and you, Señor Campas Caliente, are next in rank to him in the Cuban League," and Vique turned toward the young seaman, who answered quietly:

"Señors and camaradas, when Cuba needs my

services or my life, she can have them; but now is not the time for an outbreak, and until the proper time, I am but a lieutenant under the chief, here.

"But you know where I can be found, so command me when necessary."

With a wave of the hand, Campas Caliente turned away, and saying to Don Diablo that he would meet him in Vera Cruz he left the Tribunal Hall of Plotters, whose oppression by Spain had forced them to league with pirates.

"Come, señor, we will now go and perform the duty devolving upon us," and Don Diablo turned to his young companion, who had been an attentive but silent observer of all that had passed, and saluting the members of the *Junta*, they took their departure from the *pulperia*.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SHADOWED.

WHEN Don Diablo left the Spanish wine-shop, that held within its walls secrets that the Spanish Government would have given vast wealth to discover, at the suggestion of the young companion at his side, he changed his upright carriage and bold step to a slight stoop in the shoulders and a shuffling gait.

Hardly had they gone half a dozen blocks, when they passed a *volante*, in which sat a person who started as his eyes fell upon the youth.

For a moment the occupant of the *volante* seemed about to spring out and rush upon them; but, observing that they had not noticed him, he checked his purpose, and ordered the driver to drop back and keep them in sight.

As though fully acquainted with the city, Don Diablo led the way to an unfrequented part of the town, and directed his steps toward what had once been a fine church, but which had crumbled into sad decay, with all its surroundings.

Still it was evident that service was yet held there for the benefit of those who dwelt near, as the doors were open, and within a dim light was visible burning upon the altar.

Around the church was a high wall, and over it, in the rear of the edifice, was visible an old structure as dilapidated as was the chapel, and which was the abode of the padre.

Passing into the church, Don Diablo and his companion ascended the aisle until he came to a side door that was locked.

A loud knock upon the door brought from a room off the chancel a priest with gray hair and solemn face.

"Padre Huesca, I seek thy service," said Don Diablo, quietly.

"And who is it that seeks my services, son?" asked the priest, in deep tones.

"Thy unworthy son, Quesada."

The padre started, glanced over the church to note that there was no one present, and disappeared again within the inner room of the sanctuary.

A moment Don Diablo and the youth awaited in silence, the latter having dropped down upon his knees to murmur prayers, and then the heavy door at which they stood slowly opened and the padre confronted them.

"Enter," he said, in a low tone.

They passed through the portal out into a small court or plaza, and crossing it entered the old stone building that stood within a few paces of the church.

But hardly had they gone through the door when the one who had been in the *volante* entered the church, and saw the portal closing.

Quickly he walked to the spot and, seemingly to his joy, saw that the padre had slowly drawn it to, but not yet turned the heavy key in the lock.

He listened attentively for an instant, and hearing no sound, slowly opened the door and glanced out into the court.

No one was visible, and he boldly stepped out, shut the door behind him, and glided softly toward the stone mansion.

The door was open and he entered a hallway and stood in a listening attitude.

The hum of voices in conversation reached him from within a back room and he crept to the door, and knew that he had rightly tracked those he followed.

Attentively he listened, and what he heard seemed to affect him deeply, for he turned deadly pale and trembled violently.

Thrice he seemed as though about to enter the room, but each time checked himself to assume better control over his nerves.

At last, by a violent effort he calmed himself, and drew from his breast a pistol.

Carefully he examined it, to see that the flint was properly set and the pan filled with powder, and then, with burning eyes, set lips and determined mien, he sprang into the room, saying in ringing tones:

"Don Diablo, thou accursed pirate, you are my prisoner."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A FORCED WITNESS.

THE startling words of the person who had entered the priest's domain, and then pursued his trailing of Don Diablo directly into the very mansion of the holy father, caused all to turn quickly and gaze upon him.

One look, and the youth sunk down into a chair pale and trembling, and the padre stepped forward with angry face.

As to the disguised Don Diablo he seemed to be wholly unmoved by the appearance of the one who so boldly confronted him, and said, calmly:

"Señor, who are you, and what right have you here?"

"I have the right, Don Diablo, of having recognized that pretended boy in her disguise as my sister, and doing so, I then saw beneath your garb the form of the most fiendish devil that to-day lives to curse the earth, and I say to you now, if you move one step, if you do not submit on the instant, I will send a bullet through your brain."

There was no doubt but that the speaker meant just what he said, for it was none other than Don Isadoro Sabinas.

But for all that Don Diablo, the pirate chief, did not show the slightest sign of dread at his presence, or the danger he stood in before the man he had such cause to fear.

As for the supposed youth, whom the reader now knows was Nita Sabinas, she remained where she had sunk into the chair, almost dazed by the unexpected coming of her brother.

The padre stood in silence, evidently angry at the intrusion of a stranger into his home, but calmly watching events as they happened.

After a second of painful silence to all, Don Isadoro, with his pistol still covering the heart of the chief, said sternly, though his voice trembled slightly with suppressed emotion.

"What say you, Don Diablo? Will you submit, or shall I fire?"

"As you please, señor," was the cool reply.

But as the words left his lips, there came a motion from the padre, and out from behind a screen near the door sprang a hideous form, and Don Isadoro's form was in his grasp before he could touch the trigger.

One glance at the one who had thus seized him, and Don Isadoro was fairly alarmed, brave as he was, at the huge head, hideous face and deformed, black being that held him in his arms as though he were a child.

It was an African dwarf, with short, stumpy legs, a large body, long, muscular arms, and a head that was large enough for a giant.

He was dressed in red woolen pants, a white and blue striped shirt, wore sandals on his feet and a red cloth cap, trimmed with gold lace and ornamented with a tassel, on his woolly head.

Every feature was distorted by deformity excepting his eyes, which were as soft as a dove's, except when aroused, and full of tenderness.

"Hold, Coocha, don't hurt him!" cried Don Diablo, springing forward, as Nita shrieked at the sudden appearance of the African and the danger to her brother.

"He wantee kill chief," growled, rather than said Coocha.

"True, but I will not have you hurt him; but I thank you, Coocha, for coming to my aid, as I knew you would do, having caught sight of your handsome form when I came in."

"Have you got well?"

"Yes, chief; Coocha got all well, for good—padre make him so," was the answer.

"I knew the padre would cure you, Coocha, and that is why I left you with him to get rid of your fever."

"Now, Don Isadoro, I must relieve you of your claws, as you seem inclined to scratch," and Don Diablo very coolly took the pistol and a knife from the young Cuban, who hissed forth:

"You are indeed allied to Satan, to escape as you do, sir pirate."

"Yes, his Satanic Highness of Hades keeps me under his sheltering wing, my dear Don Isadoro."

"But I am glad that you are here, as you may be a witness in a certain important ceremony which your sweet sister and myself came here to have this worthy padre perform."

"A priest allied to a pirate," said Don Isadoro, with scorn.

"He knows me only as one who gives liberally to the church, and who asked him to care for my slave during his illness."

"I now seek him that he may perform the rites of marriage between the Donna Nita Sabinas and myself."

"Never! he will never do an act so full of sacrilege," cried the infuriated Cuban, and he seemed to meditate hurling himself, unarmed as he was, upon the pirate; but the huge hand of the deformed African dropped heavily upon his shoulder and restrained him.

"My son, this worthy person you accuse of being one whom the sea and land tremble beneath; but he looks not so vile, and surely he might charge you also with crimes, yet he does not," mildly said the padre, addressing Don Isadoro, who answered haughtily:

"He dare not accuse me of wrong doing, while he knows that he is the vilest of the vile."

"It cannot be, as this maiden, as I know her to be, is willing to be united to him in marriage."

"That maiden, priest, is my sister, the Señorita Nita Sabinas, and this man has, with

his fascinations, so charmed her as to cause her to forget honor, home and friends."

"Don Isadoro, you lie."

"Your sister is to-day as true to her honor as ever she was."

"Her home and friends she has given up to marry one whom she loves, and who loves her—"

"Love a pirate!" sneered the young man.

"She says she loves me, and she has come here to marry me."

"Nita, here is your brother; choose between us," and Don Diablo turned to the maiden, who quickly sprang to the side of the corsair, so deep was her infatuation.

"It is all I ask, señor; I will unite you in marriage," said the padre, and he drew Nita aside and held a few moments' earnest conversation with her.

"And Don Isadoro Sabinas, you shall be witness," said Don Diablo.

"Never will I look on and see my sister so disgrace herself; I will—"

"I say you will; Coocha, see that Don Isadoro remains."

The African threw his arms around the Cuban, and he felt that he was in a vise of iron.

"Now, padre, we are ready," resumed the pirate, and then followed a strange scene, the marriage of a noble maiden, clad in man's attire, to an ocean scourge, with her brother looking on as a witness.

"Perhaps, for your name's sake, you had better write your name as witness, Don Isadoro, to the certificate," said Don Diablo.

"By the cross I will do it; though accursed by her love for a pirate, she will at least be a wife," and Don Isadoro signed his name as the padre directed.

"Now, Don Isadoro, I expect two pledges from you," said Don Diablo, calmly.

"Well, sir?"

"First, that you bring no harm upon this worthy padre for his act to-day in making your sister my wife—"

"Well, señor?"

"Second, that you pledge yourself to remain here for one hour after our departure."

"If I refuse?"

"You shall die."

"Die?"

"So I said and so I mean."

Don Isadoro remained silent, and to aid in making up his mind Don Diablo said:

"I will simply leave you in Coocha's hands and—"

"I seek no such honor; I will make the pledges; but Don Diablo, I also pledge myself never to relinquish my pursuit of you."

"So be it; come, my beautiful bride, and you too, Coocha; farewell, padre."

He turned away; but with a cry Nita sprang toward her brother and cried:

"Isadoro, good-by; kiss me, brother."

He waved her from him, and Don Diablo drew the weeping maiden away, and followed by the deformed slave left the padre's house.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A DISCOVERY.

UPON the deck of the beautiful American schooner, anchored in the harbor of Havana, and in such close vicinity to the clumsy-looking lugger, stood two officers engaged in conversation, and at the same time enjoying their fragrant cigars as they paced to and fro.

One of these young officers was Guy Stanhope, the midshipman already known to the reader, and having found in the schooner's commander, Roger Warburton, an old friend, had been telling him of the capture of the craft by the pirate Don Diablo, her wreck in the hurricane, the escape of her chief, and how he had palmed himself off to the inmates of the Villa del Florida as her captain, Austin Aubrey, but being recognized by a Cuban planter, or at least suspected, Don Isadoro Sabinas had gone in his *goleta* to hunt up evidence against him, and he had gone as a witness who knew the noted rover.

"Then Aubrey owes the pirate another debt, for it is said his sister was captured some years ago, and is either a prisoner on some island now, or dead," said Lieutenant Warburton.

"Yes, she was captured by pirates, I know; but the captain never spoke of her, and no one cared to speak of the subject to him; but he was always most anxious to hunt all rovers, and is now building a vessel at his own expense, which the Government will commission for him to cruise where he pleases, in pursuit of buccaneers, and I am to be his junior luff."

"I congratulate you, Stanhope; but there goes that old ark to sea," and Lieutenant Warburton pointed to the disguised lugger, which just then swung round to the breeze and ran close in under the stern of the schooner.

"And you expect to get off to-night also, do you not, lieutenant?" asked Guy Stanhope, after the two had watched the lugger glide away in the darkness.

"Yes, as soon as my messenger returns from the consul, for I care not to wait longer, as the Mexicans are anxious to get their schooner."

"And then you return to the United States at once?"

"Yes, my officers and myself will take the New Orleans packet from Vera Cruz, and there we are to report to the Admiral of the Gulf squadron; how long have you leave for, Stanhope?"

"Some two months yet, or until the captain's new vessel is completed."

"Better run over as my guest, and return with us to New Orleans."

"I will, thank you, lieutenant, if you will make use of me, for I am tired of Havana."

"I'll give you half of a watch to keep you out of mischief," laughed Roger Warburton.

And thus conversing the two young officers paced the deck until midnight, when a boat came off with the messenger that had been sent to the consul.

Ten minutes after the beautiful schooner was flying away seaward, and by daybreak had dropped the frowning fortress of El Moro out of sight astern.

Shortly after breakfast, as Guy Stanhope was reading in the luxurious cabin of the schooner, Roger Warburton called to him to come on deck.

"Stanhope, if I did not have orders to do no fighting and run direct to Vera Cruz, I would overhaul yonder craft, few men as I have on board, for he has been in mischief," and Lieutenant Warburton pointed to a graceful *goleta* a league away, and apparently having just left a lugger that was lying to.

"It is the *goleta* of Don Isidoro Sabinas, as I live!" cried the midshipman, with some excitement, as his eyes fell upon the beautiful vessel.

"What! do you mean the one the pirate Don Diablo so cleverly got possession of, and then eluded the Spanish schooner in?"

"Yes, the same; I would know the craft among a thousand."

"Well, we will give him chase, and if he proves too strong for us, why, we can run for it."

"And, lieutenant, do you observe that that is the same lugger we saw in Havana?"

"You are right, Stanhope, as I live; well, we will run down and board him and find out who this *goleta's* commander is, for the Don may be on her, as you do not know which he remained on, when they parted company, you said."

"No, and think it was the *goleta*; but the skipper of yonder lugger can tell us, and if the Don is on the Sabinas craft, it would be a feather in your cap to take him, as with your guns you could bring him to terms."

"The *goleta* is not armed then?"

"Only with a couple of sixes to a side, and a twelve-pounder pivot in the fore-castle, more for salutes, and protection from the lagoon pirates, than anything else."

"Then ho for the lugger, first, and then for the *goleta*."

"The *goleta* is very fast; as fleet as the wind, I may say, sir," said the midshipman.

"And this schooner keeps ahead of the wind," responded Lieutenant Warburton, with a smile, and then, turning to his first officer, he gave the necessary orders for crowding sail on the schooner.

The boatswain, Campas Caliente, piped all hands on deck, and five minutes after the beautiful vessel was flying down upon the lubberly sailing lugger, which had gotten under way again, and was shaping her course due west, while the *goleta* headed northward.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A WOMAN IN THE WAY.

WHEN the lugger sailed from the harbor of Havana, so thoroughly disguised by her false bulwarks, raised stern, old sails, and her guns hidden from sight in the hold, she held on her way to the south-westward, before a fair breeze, keeping the coast of Cuba a league off on her port quarter.

She had run steadily in spite of her disguise, making a good seven knots out of a six knot breeze, when, just at dawn, as the island of Cuba was growing dim in the distance, a sail was discovered coming from the direction of Yucatan.

A second glance at the stranger and Don Diablo, who still maintained his disguise, excepting the false beard, recognized the *goleta* which he had ordered to the Bahama Wrecking Island.

"Can she have been blown off her course, or chased over toward Yucatan, or is that Sathan-ess, Alma, watching me?" he muttered, as the *goleta* drew nearer.

The rest of those on board, and who had increased in number largely, since coming out of Havana, also recognized the *goleta*, and could not understand why Don Diablo seemed anxious to avoid the craft.

But, certain it was, that he ordered more sail set, and seemed evidently determined not to allow the *goleta* to get closer if he could avoid it.

Seeing the intention of the lugger, the *goleta* at once gave chase, and at once the flight began, Don Diablo trying, as much as was in his power, to hold on his course for Vera Cruz.

"I hope Nita will not come on deck, for she will know the *goleta* at a glance," he muttered.

But, almost with the words, Alma, the octo-noon, came from the cabin, and brought a

large Turkish rug and easy-chair for her mistress.

"Say to your mistress that is a little damp for her on deck, I fear," said Don Diablo.

But Nita had a sweet will of her own, and the lugger was bowling along so delightfully that she decided to leave the cabin, and, for the life of her could not discover the dampness her husband spoke of.

"I fear you are too careful of me, Nevil," she said, in a kindly tone.

Failing in his effort to keep her below, Don Diablo tried to occupy her attention so as to keep her from discovering the *goleta*.

But Nita was one who loved the sea, and, inhaling the fresh air, she turned her gaze upon the four points of the compass, and cried, suddenly:

"Why, there is a sail."

"Yes."

"And is a West Indian, from her rig."

"Yes."

"Oh, Nevil! do you not recognize her?"

"Yes."

"It is *El Saltador*, my brother's yacht."

"Yes, it is the one I took from him."

"And you are flying from her?" she asked, in surprise.

"I am."

"She has your men on board, and—"

"Nita, when in Havana I learned that a band of lagoon pirates had captured a *goleta* answering the description of *El Saltador*, and also taken her off Pinal del Rio, which was the locality our vessel was in about that time."

"As the Lagoon Buccaneers do not belong to the Rovers' League, I fear to be overhauled, so fly from the *goleta*."

It seemed like a very plausible excuse, and Nita said no more, until it became evident that the *goleta* was gaining on the lugger.

Discovering this Don Diablo changed his course of sailing, throwing the breeze astern; but the *goleta* still gained, and more rapidly than before.

"Nevil, why do you not signal?"

"True, I never thought of that," said the cunning chief, and he ordered the flag of the Wreckers, the black field and golden eye, displayed.

Instantly the same flag went up on the *goleta*, and Don Diablo gave the order to luff up and lay to, but there was a smothered curse on his lips, and the words:

"Now I must keep Alma on the *goleta* or there will be trouble."

"Sail ho!"

The chief started, turned his glass upon the distant sail, and said:

"She is an American schooner from her rig, and is coming directly toward us."

"I must hasten to part with the *goleta*, and and now I think of it, I will send Alma to the coast retreat below Vera Cruz, for there I visit less often than the Bahamas, and she and Nita must not meet."

"No, they must not meet, even if an accident has to befall Alma."

CHAPTER XXX.

OFF THE SCENT.

As the *goleta* came on it could be seen that she had also discovered the strange sail, and was crowding all sail to reach the lugger as soon as possible.

Ordering his boat alongside, Don Diablo was about to descend into it, when Nita came forward, still attired in her masculine garb, and asked:

"Can I not go with you?"

"No, Nita, for I must hasten; give way, men!" and the boat left the side of the lugger rapidly in the direction of the approaching *goleta*, and meeting her, caused her to luff up and lay to.

"Well, señor chief, you are as thoroughly disguised as is your lugger," and Alma met Don Diablo at the gangway.

"Yes, I am just out of Havana; but come into the cabin, Alma, for I would speak with you," and the chief quickly led the way below, for he was confident the eyes of Nita were watching the *goleta* through a glass.

"Well, may I ask why you saw fit to run from your own vessel, Captain Quesada?" asked Alma, and it was evident that her suspicious nature was aroused.

"Yes, because rumor had it that the *goleta* had been captured off Pinal del Rio by lagoon pirates, and my guns being in the hold and lugger disguised, I did not care to have to fight."

"Ah! that accounts for it; now may I ask who the young man is I saw with my glass on your deck?"

"A youth I am training up to piracy."

"Ah! poor boy."

"And, Alma, why is it that I find you here, when by this time the *goleta* should have been off the Florida coast on her way to the Bahamas?"

"I was chased over into the Bay of Campeche by an English cruiser, and could not double on him to get back."

"It is just as well, for I prefer that you go

to the Mexican coast rendezvous and assume control there."

"You mean the Wizard Cave?"

"Yes."

"Why do you wish me to go there, Don Diablo?"

"Well, I have neglected the men there of late, and wish to get them more thoroughly under authority, as I will need them."

"I am now on my way to Vera Cruz, for I am going there to take a new schooner the Mexicans have had built in the United States, and then I will drop in on you for a day or two."

"As you please, Don Diablo; but of late I have grown sadly suspicious of all you do, and I warn you not to be treacherous, for, though you believe no man can kill you, a woman can."

"Nonsense, Alma, you are—"

"Señor chief, the stranger is coming down upon us like the wind, and is an armed schooner," called out Victorio Nunez down the companionway.

"Ay, ay, señor," answered the chief, and then he said to the woman:

"Alma, rigged as she is the lugger cannot fly as fast as the *goleta*, so lead this strange sail after you."

"If your lugger and crew are properly disguised as a coffee drogher why need you fly at all?"

"True; then you fly, and if he boards me I will detain him as long as possible, and say you brought me to and robbed me."

"Say what you please."

"Now adios, Señor Diablo, and remember my warning not to play me false, as something tells me you are doing, or you will find the American girl whose life you have wrecked more revengeful than a Spaniard."

Don Diablo laughed lightly, kissed Alma on the brow and ascended to the deck, followed by the jealous woman.

Seeing that the strange sail had approached uncomfortably near he turned his glass upon her and cried:

"*Nombre de Dios!* it is my schooner!"

"Your schooner?"

"Yes, Alma, the very craft I am going to Vera Cruz to get possession of, and I can tell you the *goleta* will have to fly to escape her."

"Adios!"

As the chief turned away he made a motion to Victorio Nunez, who walked to the gangway with him.

"Señor, my lieutenant, Campas Caliente, says that yonder schooner is the fastest craft afloat, so see to it that she does not overhaul you."

"If she boards me I will say you are a pirate."

Then dropping his voice he added:

"I have told Captain Alma, as the band are pleased to call her, to run for the Wizard Cave retreat, and, señor, see to it that she gets lost there."

"Señor?"

"I mean it."

"You mean, señor chief, that—"

"That she must die."

"Ah!"

"You understand me?"

"Yes, señor chief."

"Obey me."

"Si, señor."

"Adios," and Don Diablo sprung into the stern-sheets of his boat and rowed back toward the lugger, keeping the *goleta* in line so as to hide him from the approaching schooner.

As he touched his vessel the *goleta* fell off and sailed away under full sail, for the schooner was now not much over a league distant.

That it was the intention of Lieutenant Warburton to board the disguised lugger first, and then give chase to the *goleta*, the reader has already seen, and, as Don Diablo made no effort to escape, simply getting under way once more, she was soon come up with.

"Go on board of her, Stanhope, and see what you make of her," said Lieutenant Warburton, and raising his voice he hailed in Spanish:

"¡Ho! the lugger!"

"Ay, ay, señor," answered Don Diablo, in his deep tones.

"I will send a boat on board, so come to."

"Ay, ay, señor, was the reply, and as the chief brought the lugger up into the wind, he turned to Nita and said:

"Do you see the young officer getting into the boat?"

"Yes, Nevil."

"And recognize him?"

"Yes, he is the same that came with my brother to the villa to denounce you."

"Yes, and followed us in the Spanish schooner."

"I must beware, for he might recognize me, as Isidoro did, in spite of my disguise."

"True, so go into the state-room, and see that nothing of a suspicious nature is lying about the cabin to catch his eyes."

Nita disappeared and Don Diablo met his visitor at the gangway, and greeted the young midshipman in his cool, quiet way in great danger.

"Señor captain, you are a trader, I believe?" said the middy.

"Yes, señor Americano, a coast drogher."

"And you are out of what port last?"

"Havana, señor, and bound back to Trinidad."

"And yonder fast flyer?"

"Is a pirate, señor."

"Hal! as I thought, and Don Diablo is on board?"

Don Diablo in his disguise suddenly had a brilliant thought, as he imagined, to get rid of Alma, the woman whose sin was in loving him, and he said, quietly:

"Yes, señor, the chief, Don Diablo, is on board, and you have a chance to overhaul and sink him, for your vessel is fast."

"I will take him alive."

"Impossible, señor, for you seem to have a small crew, and he has a large one; but you can send him to the bottom with your heavy guns, for he will never surrender."

"Yes, we can do that, and thus rid the sea of a monster in human form."

"Did he rob your vessel?"

"Of the money I had for my employer, señor: a few thousand pesos."

"It is too bad; well, I will leave you, and if Don Diablo's life don't go down ere yonder sun reaches the western horizon, I am very much mistaken."

"I thank you captain, and *adios*."

The midshipman sprung back into his boat, which at once pulled for the schooner, while the daring chief stood watching him, a grim, strange smile upon his face.

Once on board the schooner, and the beautiful vessel filled away in pursuit of the *goleta*, now nearly two leagues away.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BUCCANEER'S RUSE.

"You are right, Stanhope; the *goleta* does sail like the wind," said Lieutenant Warburton, as the schooner Wizard got well under way in pursuit of the fast yacht.

"Yes, sir, she's a witch for sailing, as I saw when I was on the Spanish schooner; and Don Diablo had a trim-looking lugger too that was a skimmer of the waves; but we are gaining on El Saltador."

"Yes, this vessel is simply wonderful, and before night we will overhaul the *goleta*, and open on her, though it is a pity to mar such a pretty craft with our guns."

"We'll have to do it, sir, for, from what I know of Don Diablo, I am confident he will not strike his black flag, and if we don't catch her before night he'll dodge us in the darkness."

"That is what I am afraid of, as we have but a few hours to sunset, and I have been served that trick before; but in spite of his speed we are going one third faster."

"We'll get near enough to keep an eye on him at any rate, lieutenant," said Guy Stanhope.

"I sincerely hope so; but, as I said, these West Indian pirates are up to as many tricks as a girl at a ball to get partners."

"Some of them will lower their whole top-hammer, spars, yards and all before a chaplain could say his prayers, and they lie so low in the water we might dash almost over them without seeing them, and every man on the look-out."

"Again, some of them will furl every stitch of canvas, and present nothing but two slender sticks to discover her by."

"I was cruising last year in the *Vidette*, on the coast of Cuba, when a sail was discovered in the offing."

"She was a little fore-and-aft, as trim as a swallow, and skimming along over the waves at a rapid pace."

"I put after with all sail I could carry, when she changed her course and scampered away wing-and-wing dead before the wind; but finding I was gaining on him he hauled his wind and went off with a free sheet and the wind on his port beam."

"I stuck to his wake, however, and just after nightfall was within a half-league of him, and sent my compliments in the shape of a ball after him."

"He did not notice it, however, so I set studding-sails forward, and fore-and-aft main-gaff-topsails, having them sent up and bent for the purpose, and then I began to walk up on him."

"It was a starlight night, but quite dark, and I had all the crew on the look-out that the little rascal should not give us the dodge."

"Well, do you know that I got so near I was thinking about ordering a boat lowered for boarding, when a score of voices sung out:

"The chase has disappeared!"

"I immediately brought the vessel to the wind and all eyes swept the sea, but nowhere was he visible; then I put the vessel away again and cruised round in a circle: but nowhere could the little craft be discovered: but when day dawned I saw him quietly laying to a league distant, and in the very locality where I had lost him."

"Again I gave chase, and he held his lead until night, when once more he served us the

same trick, and from that day to this I have not seen him, and the men swore we had been chasing a phantom craft, but I knew better. We are gaining well on him, Stanhope."

"We are indeed, sir, and yet, judging from the distance run it will be good dark before we reduce the distance to half a mile."

"I believe you are right, for he seems on his best sailing points, and we are on our worst, with the wind abeam."

Narrowly now officers and men on the schooner watched the chase, and though the American craft steadily gained it was evident that darkness might yet favor the cunning Don Diablo, for not one now doubted but that the chief was on the *goleta*.

Nearer and nearer the schooner drew, as the hours passed, until at last the sun went down in the sea with the two vessels nearly a mile apart.

But the breeze freshening a little the schooner gained more rapidly, and at last came the welcome order:

"Clear that pivot gun for action!"

"Now let her have a shot to see if she will show her colors while we yet have light to see them," called out Lieutenant Warburton.

Instantly the large pivot gun belched forth fire, smoke and iron, and almost with the discharge up went the black flag to the peak of the *goleta*.

"Well, he's honest enough not to deny his calling at any rate; now, gunner, see if you can pitch the iron into his stern ports," called out the young officer, for the first shot had been thrown over the *goleta*.

Again the gun spoke, and the shot striking near sent the spray upon the *goleta's* decks.

"Wait until we creep nearer, gunner," ordered the lieutenant, and all watched the rapidly-settling gloom, the shadowy outline of the *goleta* and the splendid sailing of the schooner.

"Now, gunner, let her feel your iron!" ordered Roger Warburton when half an hour more had passed.

"She has disappeared, sir!"

The cry fell like a broadside upon the crew, for every eye had been upon the *goleta* but a moment before.

"Helmsman, you have let her come up a few points," cried the lieutenant.

"No, sir, she has not swerved; she steers like an arrow," answered the man at the wheel.

Roger Warburton sprung to the binnacle-light, saw the course of the schooner was the same, glanced at the sails, and then said, emphatically:

"By Heaven! he has played me that same devilish trick I told you of, Stanhope; forward there!"

"Ay, ay, sir," rung out the crew, in chorus.

"Keep a sharp look-out, lads, and three months' pay to the man who finds her!"

Every eye was at once strained to catch sight of the *goleta*, and the helmsman said:

"She bore two points to leeward, sir, when I last saw her, for I sat here by the compass."

"Then let her fall off that much and run her straight for it!" was the order.

And yet still the *goleta* could not be found.

"Have you a blue light on board, lieutenant?"

"Yes, Stanhope, and thanks for the suggestion," cried Warburton, joyfully, and a moment after the light was burned and every eye was watching the sea.

"By Heaven, she has certainly gone down!" cried Lieutenant Warburton, with chagrin.

"No, look there!"

It was Guy Stanhope that spoke, and he had grasped Warburton's arm and was pointing astern.

There, not half a dozen cables'-lengths away, a dark object was seen floating upon the sea.

"Ready about, helmsman! all hands to tack ship!"

"Lively, lads, lively!"

The ringing voice of the lieutenant sent the men springing to their posts, for they discerned the truth that the quick eye of the midshipman had discovered the *goleta*.

The boatswain's whistle piped shrilly, the schooner's head swept up to the wind, as though the hull worked on a pivot, and then, amid the flying of sheets and braces, the swinging of yards and swooping over of booms, her sharp bows were set the other way, and like a racer she was dashing off in the direction in which Guy Stanhope had discovered the *goleta*.

"She had taken in every stitch of canvas, sir, and lay under bare poles; we must have gone within a couple of cables'-lengths of her," said Guy Stanhope.

"A sail dead ahead, sir!" sung out a look-out forward.

The next instant there dashed into sight the *goleta* under clouds of canvas, and from her decks rung out the cheery cry in a clear voice:

"Buenas noches, señores!"

And almost in a minute's time she was far astern.

CHAPTER XXXII.

RUN DOWN.

"READY about!"

The sharp command rung out from Roger

Warburton's lips as soon as he could realize that the *goleta* had made sail, after her discovery, as if by magic, and had passed the schooner without a single shot.

As quickly as the schooner could be brought about it was done, the drum beat to quarters, and away she dashed in full chase.

Ahead, nearly the third of a mile, like a cloud on the waters, the *goleta* was visible, flying along under all the canvas she could carry, and bending far over under the pressure of the ten-knot breeze.

On board the schooner all was intense excitement, and the men eagerly and impatiently waited for the command they knew must soon come to open fire.

"We are gaining, sir, for I can see her yards now," said Guy Stanhope.

"Then I will open on him before he disappears again, and the men get to really believing it is a phantom ship, commanded by Satan in the form of Don Diablo."

"Forward there!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Train that long gun on yonder cunning scamp, and cripple him!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" called out the gunner, only too anxious to obey.

The gun was loaded, carefully sighted, the fuse lighted and applied to the priming, and away went the shrieking ball of iron, aimed with remarkable accuracy, and back to the ears of those on the schooner came the crashing of timbers and the groans of men hard hit.

"Bravo, gunner! you have hit him hard! now give him another!"

And another shot was poured upon the *goleta* with the same fatal effect.

"Now luff! At the guns there!"

"Let her have your broadside!"

The schooner's broadside went hurtling upon the little craft, and then, for the first time, the *goleta* returned the fire from her small guns.

"Ah! that adds interest; I wondered if the famous Don Devil was going to let us hit him and not strike back; but Goddess of the Sea spare this, the most beautiful craft that skims the waves," cried Lieutenant Warburton.

"And I say amen to that prayer," sung out Guy Stanhope.

"And it is answered, for see, they have missed us wholly."

"But don't you spare them, lads! another broadside; fire!"

Again was heard the terrific crashing of timbers following the schooner's heavy broadside, and the firing on the *goleta* suddenly ceased.

"She has got it! now I'll hail and ask if he has struck his sable flag, for I don't wish to kill the Don—oh no! I wish to hang him."

"Aho! the *goleta*!" and Warburton's voice went ringing over the water.

"Ay, ay, Señor Americano!" came back in a clear, womanly voice.

"Have you struck?"

"No, señor!"

"The devil! he does mean we shall kill him; well, we'll give him a little more iron."

"At the guns, there!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Play your iron trumpets once more; he still wants to dance to our music!"

In response to the command of the lively young officer, the guns of the schooner again sent forth their iron hurricane upon the little *goleta*, until one of the masts was seen to go over the side, carrying with it her huge lateen sail into the sea.

A cheer burst from the schooner's crew; all except from the lips of one man.

That one was Campas Caliente, the boatswain; his heart seemed not in the wreck and death they were pouring upon the beautiful *goleta*.

"She is crippled and cannot escape."

"I hope he'll strike now," and raising his voice Lieutenant Warburton hailed once more, as the schooner went bounding along under the stern of the *goleta*:

"Ho, sir pirate!"

"Ay, ay, Señor Americano," came the answer in the same effeminate, yet rich voice as before.

"Have you struck?"

"No!"

The answer was more emphatic and decided than before.

"I will sink you."

"As you please, señor."

"Give him another broadside!" yelled Lieutenant Warburton, angrily.

And again the guns belched forth, and once more the schooner went tearing by on another tack.

"Do you strike now, sir pirate?"

"No!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A STRANGE PRIZE.

THE stubborn refusal of the *goleta* to strike her flag, although a wreck upon the waters, and with the groans of her dying crew reaching the ears of those on the schooner, puzzled Roger Warburton and his men not a little.

With but a score of men on his own vessel to work it, and also man the guns, he dared not

board the *goleta*, as he knew not what force the pirate carried.

But determined, either to make him strike or sink him, he wore ship once more and again sent a broadside upon the doomed craft.

"Do you strike now?" he called out again in hoarse, angry tones.

"No, señor, sink me," was the fearless response.

"By the gods of war, but I will," cried Warburton, furiously.

"Hold! Lieutenant Warburton, that is a woman's voice as I live," called out Guy Stanhope.

"By Neptune! you are right, I verily believe, Stanhope."

"You remember that I told you of the chief running off with the Señorita Sabinas, who loved him, believing him to be an honorable man, in fact Captain Austin Aubrey, and was so infatuated that—"

"She would not give him up on discovering who he was!"

"Yes, I remember it, Stanhope, and do not wonder at it, for she, being a woman, is an enigma; but what then?"

"I believe, sir, that Don Diablo has been killed, and that the one who hailed is the Señorita Sabinas, who is anxious to die too, rather than go back to her home in disgrace."

"Right you are, I'll wager six months' pay, Guy; but what are we to do?"

"It is a matter of very little importance to you whether those fellows are dead or alive, so you know the fate of Don Diablo, and can save that beautiful girl?"

"I don't care a copper for them, Stanhope."

"Then offer all who surrender, excepting the officers, a free pardon."

"I'll do it, by the hoary head of old Neptune: Helmsman!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Run close in under the *goleta's* stern when we wear ship and go back on the other tack."

"Yes, sir."

The lieutenant then gave the order to "bout ship," and the next moment the schooner was pointing so as to pass within her length of the *goleta*.

"At the guns there!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Cease firing until further orders, now!" and raising his voice he called out: "Well, have you struck your flag?"

"No, señor."

"All right; all on board that craft, excepting officers, who will surrender, shall have a free pardon for their crimes of piracy."

A faint cheer came from half a dozen voices on the *goleta*, and then a voice was heard in angry denunciation, followed by several pistol shots in rapid succession, and the clash of steel against steel.

"Great God! they are fighting among themselves; bark!"

It was Roger Warburton who spoke, and springing to the schooner's wheel he brought her up into the wind, and she lay quiet upon the waters.

"Help! she is killing us! help, for the love of the Virgin!"

"Quick! let a boat be manned and I will board," cried Guy Stanhope, and he ran to the starboard davits, and in a minute's time a cutter was in the sea with a full crew in it.

"Be wary, Stanhope, and if you need me, hail!" cried Warburton, as the boat pulled away with the tiller-ropes held in the firm gripe of the daring midshipman.

The sea was rough, yet not running high, and without much difficulty the boat was laid alongside of the low hull of the *goleta*, and Guy Stanhope, cutlass in hand, sprung on board, followed by the half-dozen seamen who had accompanied him.

As their feet touched the deck amidships, a sickening scene met the gaze of the Americans, for the foremast was gone, shot away even with the bulwarks, the mainmast was tottering, and the wreck of rigging and sails hung about it.

The decks were seamed with shot-marks, and strewn with the dead, while the bulwarks were shattered, and the small guns, which Don Isadoro had been so proud of using in salutes, were all dismounted except the one on the forecabin.

Not a human being was visible upon his feet, and yet one-half rose as the Americans came on deck.

"Well, my lad, you seem all of life that is left here," said Guy Stanhope, kindly.

"I am, your honor, all that can kick on deck," said the man, in a rich English accent; "but," he added in a low tone, "there's life in the cabin yet, I can swear."

"Why did you not strike your flag and save this bloodshed?"

"Well, sir, it was an easier death to die than by a rope, the lads thought."

"But pardon was offered you."

"And the few of us left was longing for it, sir; but that handsome devil on the forecabin would not allow it, and when we called out to accept your terms, sir, we were just shot down to the last man, and there were five of us standing then."

"I got it here, sir, and I guess I'm done for."

The midshipman bent over and looked at the man's wound.

It was a pistol-shot in the right side, and had bled freely.

"Well, my man, the surgeon of the schooner may pull you through yet," he said, not unkindly.

"To be hanged, sir?"

"No, you accepted the offer of Lieutenant Warburton, and will be pardoned."

"Look after him, lads."

"The *goleta* is settling fast, sir," said the boatswain, Campas Caliente.

"Yes, sir, she got it strong between wind and water," said the wounded pirate.

"Well, we will not tarry; now, who is in the cabin, my man?"

"Only one, sir."

"Don Diablo?"

"One who is his equal, sir."

The midshipman waited to hear no more, but telling the men to look over the *goleta*, and if he needed them he would call, he walked quickly aft.

A battle lantern or two continued to burn, showing clearly the sickly scene; but in the cabin a bright light was burning, and with his cutlass ready Guy Stanhope entered.

The handsome cabin had not escaped unmarred, for the cruel shot had torn their way through it, scattering ornaments here and there, shattering the furniture, and playing sad havoc generally.

But in the companionway Guy Stanhope paused, for before him he beheld a slender form, clad in half dress uniform, and leaning upon the table, before which he sat, his head buried in his arm.

A splintered mark across the table showed where a shot had cut its way, and the midshipman believed that the one he saw was dead.

But no, as he looked the head was raised, and a profile of rare beauty was visible.

And rising, there was seen in the hand a silver cup, and slowly it was brought toward the lips.

Unconscious of the presence of a stranger, the lips moved, and the words distinctly reached the ears of the midshipman:

"Well, the end is come, and I have escaped unhurt through this bell of iron hail, while others have fallen around me."

"But I will not be taken alive, and I too will die by this fatal cup, and my victors will consider that I am a boy and I'll be thrown into the sea, and none ever know the fate of Alma Aubrey."

"Ah me! mine has been a sad lot, but circumstances, not intention to sin, made me what I am, and I will end this wretchedness, and none will mourn me, not even Reno Quesala."

As she ceased speaking she raised the cup slowly to her lips.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE LAST OF THE GOLETA.

As the cup approached her lips, although her hand was firm as a rock, Alma Aubrey could not restrain a shudder.

But while a stern look crept over her face she brought it nearer, and the next instant the fatal draught would have been taken and the wretched woman have ended her own life, had the midshipman not bounded forward and dashed the goblet to the floor.

A shriek burst from the pallid lips of Alma Aubrey, and turning upon the intruder, she attempted to draw a pistol from her belt.

But there was a gripe upon her slender wrist she could not resist, while Guy Stanhope said, sternly:

"Hold! do not struggle, for it will be useless; as I have help at hand, and no one need know who you are, if you remain quiet."

"Do you know who I am?" she asked, turning more pale than she had in the presence of the death she sought.

"Yes."

"You think I am the son of Don Diablo?"

"No."

"Who then?"

"You are a woman."

"Hail how know you this?"

"The beauty of your face and form would betray you to me if not to others."

"Oh God! my beauty has been my curse."

"Alas! I fear that it is so."

"You speak kindly to me, and yet you find me on board this craft."

"I know who you are."

"And who am I?" she asked, in a trembling voice.

"Alma Aubrey."

"Heaven have mercy! I am utterly lost."

"No, I will not betray you."

"If you will do this for me I will worship you; do you know aught of me?"

"I know your brother well; I was serving as senior midshipman on board his vessel, and was in command, as duty ashore called the other officers and most of the crew, when Don Diablo captured her."

"Was he killed by our fire?"

"Who?"

"Don Diablo."

"Ah, no."

"Then he lives?" eagerly asked the midshipman.

"Yes."

"And is wounded, or—"

"He is not wounded."

"Nor dead?"

"I said no."

"Where is he?"

"He is not here."

"I know to the contrary."

"You do not."

"I say I do, for I boarded the lugger he robbed this afternoon."

A scornful laugh from the woman caused Guy Stanhope to regard her with surprise.

"Why do you laugh?"

"At your words."

"Where is the fun in them?"

"You say he robbed a lugger this afternoon?"

"Yes, you know it as well as I."

"He did not."

"I saw this *goleta* alongside a lugger, and boarding her was told by her skipper that Don Diablo had brought her to and robbed her, and that the noted pirate was on this craft."

A scornful laugh from the woman again puzzled the midshipman, and he continued:

"I happen to know that he captured this *goleta* on the southern coast of Cuba, from a planter whose daughter he also kidnapped—"

With the bound of a tigress the woman sprung before the midshipman, and faced him with glaring eyes, while she said in a commanding tone:

"Repeat those words! he kidnapped a maiden, you said?"

Surprised at her earnest manner and the suppressed passion in her look and tone he said:

"Yes, he was wrecked in the vessel he took from me, and which your brother commanded, and his life was saved by the Señorita Nita Sabinas."

"Nita Sabinas?"

"Yes."

"Nita Sabinas," repeated the woman, as though trying to fix the name upon her memory forever.

"That was the name."

"She saved his life?"

"Yes, she drew him from the surf and nursed him through his illness, for he had a broken arm, and all this time she believed him to be Captain Austin Aubrey."

"My brother?"

"You admit then that he is your brother?"

"Go on; we were speaking of Don Diablo and Nita Sabinas," she said, in a tone of authority.

"Well, she ran off with Don Diablo, even after she knew who and what he was, and I was in the Spanish schooner that gave chase to his lugger and this *goleta*, which belonged to Don Isadoro Sabinas."

The woman was now as white as a corpse, and her form trembled violently while she said, after several efforts to keep calm:

"I was captured by one who who would have made me his slave, and Don Diablo rescued me from him."

"He swore that he loved me, he treated me with respect and kindness, and he fascinated me, and now I am what I am."

"Another woman of honor has, like myself, been fascinated by the serpent, and from my heart I pity her."

"No, Don Diablo is not on this *goleta*, sir, for the reason that he was on the lugger you overhauled the day just passed."

"The lugger?"

"Yes."

"That was a coffee drogher."

"Not so; it was the very lugger you say you had chased, only so disguised by a false stern, bulwarks and old sails and slight change of rig."

"By Heaven, I believe you are right."

"I know I am; he ordered me to an island rendezvous, when we parted from the lugger some days ago, and meeting again, for I was run off my course by a cruiser, he ordered me to another retreat, and thither I was going when you chased me."

"You are in command of this *goleta*, then?" asked Guy Stanhope, in surprise.

"Victorio Nunez was sailing-master, but I was the one in command."

"And you say that Don Diablo was on the lugger?"

"Yes."

"I would like to have seen him."

"Did you see her skipper?"

"Yes."

"A tall man with heavy beard?"

"Yes."

"What said he to you?"

"That Don Diablo had robbed his vessel and was on this *goleta*."

"Aught else said he?"

"Yes, that he would not surrender, and the only way was to sink the *goleta* and all on board."

"Hail! that is what he said!"

"Yes."

"Well, the *goleta* is sinking."

"Yes."

"And all on board are dead, excepting myself."

"No, one of the crew, an Englishman, lives."
 "Ha! I did not do my work well, for I intended all should die, rather than be taken and be known in my disgrace, when I am believed dead by my brother."

"That is why you would not strike your flag?"

"Yes."

"You wished to go down?"

"Yes, and shot down those who wished to accept your offer of pardon."

The midshipman fairly started at the revelation of the woman; but said:

"I am glad you did not die by your own hand."

"I am sorry; no, no, I am not sorry now, for I wish to live to again meet Don Diablo," and there was a dangerous glitter in her eye.

"Well, I pledge you I will not betray you, so have no fear, as none shall know you other than as a youth, and I will aid your escape."

"I thank you; but come, you see how the *goleta* rocks; she is settling fast."

The two hastily left the cabin, and arriving on deck found that the Englishman was dying, and Campas Caliente was bending over him, while the rest of the boat's crew were gathering what booty they could find.

"Come, lads, let us away," called out Guy Stanhope, advancing with his prisoner.

Campas Caliente started, as did the woman, when their eyes met, and the Cuban again bent over the dying Englishman, and none saw the knife in his hand sink deep into his side.

"Let us take that poor devil with us, boat-swain," said the midshipman.

"He is dead, sir," was the quiet reply.

"Very well, let us hasten."

All sprung into the boat and cast off, and ere they had pulled a dozen lengths toward the schooner, the *goleta*, with a mighty plunge, sunk beneath the waves.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE WIZARD CAVERN.

ABOUT sixty miles from Vera Cruz, and to the south on the Mexican coast, is a lofty mountain whose side slopes downward to the sea.

From the ocean the mountain looks grand and yet desolate, for no habitation is visible upon its slopes, and no curling smoke arises from the glens and valleys to mark the home of man.

Bordering the Gulf of Mexico, the coast breaks off abruptly at this point, where a rocky arm juts out into the water, forming a small bay where a vessel can ride safely at anchor, uncaring for the storms without.

A number of conical rocks, in fact rising in all kinds of picturesque shapes, are visible on all sides, and cavernous retreats pierce far in beneath the hills, and into those fronting the sea, when the gales blow from the Gulf, the waves rush with the shock of an earthquake, and break into spray with a roar like a hundred guns in action.

Once this bay and its rugged coast was the retreat of pearl-divers, who eked out there a fair living.

But one night of storm the mountain trembled and lurid flames and black dust and rocks were thrown from many of its cavernous retreats, and away fled the pearl-divers, believing the spot to be the abode of some huge wizard, and some, in their superstitious dread, calling it the home of Satan himself.

It was toward this coast, and into the channel leading to the little bay, that a vessel was heading one dark, stormy night, a week after the chase and destruction of the *goleta* El Salvador.

Upon the cliff stood a man in top-boots and a heavy cloak, though otherwise he was dressed as a Mexican, and wore a broad sombrero upon his head.

He was watching the vessel come in, and said quietly, as he lowered his glass from his eyes:

"Her pilot knows the channel; but I do not recognize the craft, and did not learn of any vessel expected here."

"Malo!"

The last word was called in a loud tone, and he turned toward a large cavernous opening not far behind him.

But no answer came, and he placed a whistle to his lips and gave a shrill blast.

A moment and it was answered by a like shrill note, and soon after a man appeared, coming out of the cavern, and drawing his cloak around him as he confronted the fierce winds.

There was an air of a person above the ordinary class of life about the new-comer, as was there also about the man who stood on the cliff, and he saluted the one who had called him with respect.

"Señor, how can I serve you?" he asked in Spanish.

"Malo, yonder vessel is running into the bay under a pilot who knows well the channel."

"A vessel, and no report made by the look-out? This is strange," and the man, who answered to the name of Malo, gave a long, sharp whistle, and repeated it three times.

Hurrying feet were at once heard approaching, and two men in sailor garb came from the cavern.

"José, you and Juan go at once to the look-out on the mountain and see why he has not reported yonder vessel; hold! there is his signal now," and as Malo spoke there resounded through the cavern the ringing of a tocsin.

"Yes, the low clouds doubtless obscured the vessel from the vision of the look-out; but what do you expect in, Malo?" said the one who had been first on the cliff.

"Nothing, señor, for the Don has lost his vessel, and the craft is too large for a smuggler."

"There goes the look-out's signal, and we shall know what he is."

As Malo spoke a red light flashed in a circle for an instant on the mountain as though a man had whirled a lantern around his head, and a second after a blue light was seen.

A moment passed and all eyes were turned upon the vessel still running rapidly in.

Then there was visible upon her decks what appeared to be a huge eye of fire.

"It is the chief, Don Diablo; that is his signal," cried Malo, and he stepped closer to the one he had come out to join and continued in a low tone:

"Señor, you had better retreat now to your quarters, for you care not to be seen."

"Oh, no, he must not see me, or even suspect, until I am ready to act."

"Good-night, Malo, and when the chief has left come and talk with me."

"I will, señor," answered Malo, and as the other turned away and entered the cavern, accompanied by the two sailors, he descended a steep path leading to the beach below.

By the time he reached the sandy shore of the little bay, the strange vessel had run in and dropped anchor, while a boat was putting off from her side.

Malo and his two comrades awaited the boat in silence until it grated on the sand, and a tall form sprung ashore.

"Welcome, señor chief; your visit is unexpected," said Malo, extending his hand, which Don Diablo grasped.

"Yes, I was running up to Vera Cruz in my lugger, and remembering that she was known there, I concluded to put in here and take a horse up to the city; you can furnish me with two?"

"Yes, señor; and you will leave the lugger here?"

"Yes, Malo; but has the *goleta* not arrived?"

"What *goleta*, señor chief?"

"I captured a craft which I sent here under Victorio Nunez, with Captain Alma in command."

"She has not put into the bay, señor chief."

"This is remarkable, and I have been delayed, too."

"I guess the American schooner must have overhauled her and either taken her or sunk her," said Don Diablo, speaking more to himself than to his companion.

"She is overdue, then?"

"Yes, for with the strong breezes we have had she should have been here days ago, as she is very fleet."

"She must have been taken, then, and it is bad, for you have met severe reverses of late, señor chief."

"Yes, but they are only temporary set-backs, and I go now to get me a vessel that will add new terror to the name of Don Diablo," was the savage response.

"Well, señor, when do you wish your horses?"

"Upon second thoughts I will need but one, for, if the *goleta* is not here, there will be no necessity to have a comrade go with me I expected to take."

"But, Malo, I wish the lugger towed into the Wizard Basin to-night, and a guard set to prevent any one leaving the craft, and, should the *goleta* come in, have her run into the Black Inlet, and on no account let the crew of one vessel know that the other is here."

"It shall be as you say, chief; will you go up to the cavern now?"

"No, I will return on board and meet you there in half an hour."

Without another word Don Diablo sprung into his boat, and Malo returned up the steep path to the cliff.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

FROM DECK TO SADDLE.

WHEN Don Diablo returned on board the lugger he was met at the cabin companionway by Nita Sabinas, attired still in her masculine dress.

"Well, Nevil, I am ready," she said, pleasantly.

"My dear little girl, I am compelled to disappoint you, for I can obtain but one horse, and I will have to leave you in command of the lugger, for you are my lieutenant now."

Nita looked disappointed, but made no reply, and the chief continued:

"The lugger will be towed into a secret basin, and, as I desire none of the smugglers here to know that we have run in, do not permit any one of the crew to go ashore."

"And must I too be debarred from a glance at the green fields, valleys and mountains?" she asked.

"Yes, for the present, little girl; but when I get my new schooner then we will land many a time and enjoy a trip on shore."

"Ah me! I fear no grass will look as green, no trees will cast as cooling shade, no mountains will be as grand as those of my loved Cuba, in my dear old home."

"Don't get blue, Nita; I have only you to live for, and if I were in a dungeon with you I would be content."

"I do not repine, Nevil; I gave up all for you and I ask no more."

"When do you return?"

"Within a week at furthest."

"A long week away?"

"It may be in shorter time you will see me."

"Now farewell."

He kissed her affectionately, and as he turned away, still clinging to him, she said, earnestly:

"Do not be reckless and get into trouble that may end fatal y."

"Nita, I am not doomed to die yet."

"I carry my destiny in my own hand, and I have an iron gripe upon it yet."

"Adios."

He turned away and was soon once more on shore.

As though perfectly familiar with the place, he ascended the path to the cliff, entered the cavern, and, feeling against the rocky side, found a rope ladder.

This he ascended for some thirty feet and stepped upon a rocky platform, upon which a lantern dimly burned.

Passing through a narrow passage between the rocks, he came to a large cavern, some sixty feet in depth and thirty wide, with shelves ranged along the sides, and swinging iron lamps giving light to the place.

In the center of this huge rock-chamber was a long table, surrounded by benches, upon which sat a score of roughly-dressed, reckless-looking men.

Woolen shirts, canvas pants, and sailor caps predominated in the dress of the men, though their nationalities were Mexican, Cuban, Spanish, American and French; in fact, they were the dare-devils and outlaws of half a score of countries, banded together for safety and crime.

At the appearance of Don Diablo in their midst, they all arose from the table, upon which were scattered cards, dice and dominoes, and saluted him with a respect that was born of fear rather than love.

"Well, lads, how is business with you?" asked the chief, throwing himself down at one end of the table.

"A little dull, just now, señor chief; but soon our trade will open briskly again," answered one, who seemed to be an officer.

"Well, I may give you a chance soon to fill your pockets with gold, but it will be by piracy, not smuggling, and consequently cause you to face double the danger you do now."

"But I will want only men who are not afraid of death."

"You can find 'em here, señor chief, and I hope you'll want us soon, for our blades are rusting, and our muscles softening on account of having no work, while Captain Malo said only yesterday, if he had a good craft, he would like to take a short cruise just for luck."

"Captain Malo shall have a good craft before long, my lads— Ah, Malo, you are here, are you?"

"Yes, señor, and your horse awaits in the valley for you," replied Malo, whose face the light of the lanterns falling upon, was seen to be that of a Cuban, dark, severe, full of a quiet dignity and courage, and intelligent, and a trifle reckless.

He was dressed in a Mexican caballero suit, with great neatness, wore a soft sombrero, encircled by a gold cord, and beneath his Spanish cloak, which hung over his shoulders, were visible in his belt a trio of pistols and a poniard, the hilt of which sparkled with gems.

Without another word, yet with an inclination of his haughty head to the outlaws, Don Diablo arose and followed Malo from the cavern, and, after passing through a long passageway, they came to a glen.

Here stood a man holding a horse, and quickly the chief mounted.

"Captain Malo, I shall return within a week—"

"Barring accidents, captain, death and—"

"I shall meet with no accidents, señor, but shall return within a week, and perhaps sooner."

"Please remember my orders regarding the guard over the lugger's crew, after it is turned into the Wizard Basin, and in reference to the *goleta*, should she come into the bay."

"I will, señor chief; you change horses at the hacienda of Canova, you know?"

"Yes, and the two horses ought to fetch me to the city by sun-up."

"Buenas noches, Señor Malo."

Driving his spurs into the flanks of the hardy Mexican horse, Don Diablo dashed away at a speed that showed he had no mercy for the animal.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A DANGEROUS RECOGNITION.

HALTING only long enough at the hacienda to get another horse, Don Diablo pressed rapidly on, and drew his gaunt, panting animal up at the door of the principal hotel in Vera Cruz, just as the sun rose above the watery horizon.

Throwing the bridle rein to a servant in waiting, he entered the hotel, and asking for a room was assigned a pleasant one, as his appearance was such that the landlord desired to treat him with the greatest respect.

But hardly had Don Diablo gone to his chamber and brushed the dust of travel from his clothes, when there came a gentle knock at his door, and in obedience to his call to enter, he started at seeing a Mexican lieutenant and a file of soldiers file in.

"Well, señor, what means this intrusion?" he asked, haughtily, though he did not change color or move.

"I beg pardon, señor, if there is a mistake, but there is a man here who says he saw you ride up to the hotel, and recognized in you a very dangerous person," politely answered the officer.

"Indeed! and what dangerous person am I said so much to resemble?" asked the chief, with a sneer.

"Don Diablo, the Rover, señor."

A laugh broke from the pirate's lips, and without the slightest sign of anger or emotion he answered:

"A very dangerous recognition I should say, señor officer, to be suspected of being that famous chief—a man with a rope around his neck."

"But the same mistake has occurred before, in Havana and in New Orleans."

"I cannot say, señor, that I believe you to be such; but your accuser is a wealthy ranchero, and a person of distinction, and rode in from his ranch this morning and saw you on the road."

"He says he was once your captive and paid you ransom."

"You mean the captive of the pirate Don Diablo, señor, and paid him ransom."

"Yes, pardon me, if you are not the chief."

"Who is my accuser?"

"I am here, Don Diablo, to face you," and into the room stepped a gray-haired Mexican caballero, with stern face and flashing eyes.

Don Diablo at a glance recognized him as one he had once captured and severely treated, besides having mulcted him out of a most liberal ransom; but he gazed calmly into the face of his accuser, and said, in his pleasant way:

"We have never met before, señor."

"And I say we have; I will swear that you are Don Diablo the pirate."

"Your name, please, señor."

"Don Romero Carravas."

"Well, Don Romero Carravas, I am happy to see that you have the appearance of a gentleman, for I shall hold you personally responsible for this insult."

"You will be hanged for piracy instead," said the Mexican.

"You are mistaken, señor; I am Nevil Vane, an American gentleman, and I own a partnership in the Canova hacienda ten leagues from here, and from whence I have just come."

The Mexican officer seemed impressed with the idea that his countryman had made a mistake, and so suggested:

But Don Romero was firm, and said angrily: "I suffered too much at the hands of that devil not to know him if I met him at the ends of the earth."

"I make the charge that he is Don Diablo, the pirate, and I am ready to take the consequences."

"Have you no proof, señor, that you are what you say?" asked the officer, again staggered by the firmness of the ranchero.

"Oh yes."

"Of course he has trumped-up papers to carry him out in his assertions, but they are false, false as—"

With a spring Don Diablo had confronted his accuser and his fist, driven into the Mexican's face, checked his words, and sent him reeling into the corner of the room.

Then turning to the officer he said with the utmost coolness:

"Señor lieutenant, to satisfy you that I speak the truth, please let one of your men go to the Barracks and ask for Major Fernando Navaro—"

"My chief!" said the surprised officer.

"Yes, for I see you wear the uniform of his regiment."

"Please let your soldier say to Major Navaro that his old friend, Nevil Vane, is here and in trouble, and if he recognizes me as being what I say I am, I suppose you will be satisfied?"

"More than satisfied, Señor Vane," responded the officer, fully impressed with the danger of doubting the gentleman's word before him, after having seen an exhibition of his marvelous strength visited upon Don Romero, who had collected himself from the corner, and with his handkerchief was mopping the blood from his face, for the fist of the pirate had left its mark.

"Are you satisfied, Don Romero, if Major

Navaro recognizes the gentleman?" asked the officer, and the Mexican ranchero answered whinily:

"If he knew Major Navaro, why did he not prove I was wrong?"

"As for your being satisfied or not, I care nothing, Sir Mexican."

"I punished you for your insulting words, and if you do not steer clear of me while I am in your city it will be the worse for you," and turning to the young officer the chief offered him a cigar to smoke while awaiting the return of the soldier.

They had not very long to wait, for a firm step was soon heard in the hall, and an officer entered clad in full uniform, and his dark, handsome face showing signs of having had no rest during the night past.

"Well, Lieutenant Sagarta, what means this sending for me?" asked Major Fernando Navaro sternly, addressing the young officer, and apparently not seeing the tall form of the chief.

"Don Romero called at the Barracks, Señor Major, for me to come with him and arrest a person he recognized as Don Diablo! but as the gentleman sends for you there must be some mistake."

"Yes, my dear Navaro, I have been taken for that curse of the sea, instead of Nevil Vane, as you know me to be," and Don Diablo advanced toward the Mexican.

Major Navaro turned very quickly, and had he not done so, his soldiers would have seen his face grow deadly pale; but without hesitation, though his voice was hoarse, from an effort to be perfectly calm, he answered:

"Yes indeed, I am delighted to see you, Vane, yet regret this unfortunate mistake."

"My dear Don Romero there has been a fearful mistake on your part, for this gentleman is an American, whom I have known for years," and Major Navaro shook hands most cordially with his old friend, while Don Romero began:

"I am indeed sorry—"

"I accept no apologies from you, señor, and if you do not like the blow I gave you, or my tone, I can be found here at this hotel."

"You, Señor Sagarta, I thank for your courtesy."

The officer saluted and with his men followed the crestfallen Don Romero out of the room, and the two, the major and the pirate, were alone.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A PAIR OF VILLAINS.

For some moments after the withdrawal of the soldiers and Don Romero the ranchero from the hotel room, where Don Diablo had so nearly met his just doom, the Mexican major and the pirate chief regarded each other in silence.

The face of the former was black with passion, and he stood like a tiger preparing to spring upon his prey.

The face of the latter was smiling, calm, reckless and defiant, and he leaned against the window, quietly puffing his cigar.

At last Don Diablo spoke, and his tones were strangely soft as he said:

"You seem to believe what you said, my dear Navaro, and are not glad to see your old friend Vane."

"Reno Quesala, I have half a mind to give you over to the authorities," hissed the major.

"It would be worth it, for, let me see, Mexico offers half a hundred thousand pesos on my head; the Captain-General as much more, the United States is less liberal, yet as anxious to catch me, while England promises to pay as much as America, so that you would get by the transaction over one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, not to speak of the name of having captured Don Diablo."

"Oh, curse you!"

"Curses do me no more harm, my dear major, than do prayers do me good."

"Ropes, powder and steel I shun, and I take big chances with them."

"In the name of Satan, why came you here?"

"On business."

"Curse your business!"

"I don't say so."

"When did you come?"

"This morning."

"How?"

"Get your spies to tell you."

"It was reported that your vessel was sunk."

"I have lost several since last we met."

"And that you were dead."

"That is a mistake."

"I wish it was true."

"Doubtless."

"When do you leave here?"

"When I accomplish what I came for."

"And boldly put up at a hotel?"

"Why not?"

"Hundreds know you."

"Oh, no, not here."

"Don Romero did."

"But you knowing me got me out of that scrape."

"I'll not do it again."

"Oh, yes, you will."

"Never!"

"You lie."

"Señor!"

"You know it."

"I say I will not raise hand to save you."

"I believe you; if you dared, you would raise hand to strike me in the back."

"I am no assassin, Quesala."

"You are worse."

"Señor."

"Oh, you do not make me tremble, Major Navaro, so be less dramatic and more rational."

"In Heaven's name! your coming here will ruin me."

"It need not."

"But it will."

"Not if you behave yourself as a villain should."

"I'll not hear such language even from your lips."

"Oh, yes, you will; hold! touch that sword-hilt again, and, Fernando Navaro, it will be the worse for you."

With a muttered curse the Mexican dropped his hand from the sword hilt, and said, almost pleadingly:

"For Heaven's sake, Quesala, leave this city."

"Fernando Navaro, you know me as I do you."

"I came here to accomplish a certain purpose, and I shall do it."

"When that is done I will leave, and not before."

"And your coming will compromise me."

"Not in the least."

"It must."

"No, but if I get into trouble I shall call on you to help me out."

"I will not do it."

"You will."

"Not for the wealth of a Spanish galleon."

"But for old friendship's sake you will; you stand high, none better, with the government, while your being chief of the secret service has given you secrets to hold in *terrorem* over the heads of your superior officers."

"You can take me around to the club, and introduce me to your friends as your dear friend from America, Nevil Vane, and all will be well."

"I will not do it."

"You mean it?"

"Yes."

"Beware!"

"You cannot frighten me."

"Then I shall simply make known that when the then Lieutenant Fernando Navaro went on a coast surveying expedition with three superior officers, and they were captured by pirates, and he alone bravely escaped, that he did so with the consent of the chief, Don Diablo, who found in him a tool to use in Vera Cruz, and put his comrades to death, that he might go up the ladder of promotion."

"And more, that the dashing Major Navaro, feared by men, and petted by women, received twenty thousand pesos for informing Don Diablo when the Mexican treasure-ship was to sail from Vera Cruz to Jamaica for arms and supplies to be purchased there."

"And more, my virtuous major, I will—"

"Hold! you would not dare make these charges against me, for you would be hanged, and—"

"I would lose my life to hang you, my dear Navaro, for I know you as you are."

"Enough, we need not quarrel."

"That is just what I said."

"Keep clear of me, though—"

"No, no; on the contrary you are going to show me Vera Cruz, its beauties, its belles, and its dignitaries."

"Now remain and breakfast with me, for it will have a good effect, as the news has doubtless spread of your intimate friend being mistaken for that monster Don Diablo."

"Come, let us go to breakfast, for I am hungry."

The Mexican dared not refuse, and the two men went together to their morning meal.

And opposite to them sat two persons, one of whom started when his eyes fell upon the chief.

That one was Guy Stanhope, and his companion was Lieutenant Roger Warburton.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ON THE VERY VERGE.

WITH the utmost *sang froid*, Don Diablo and his fellow-villain, Major Fernando Navaro, partook of their breakfast, those who saw them little dreaming the dark history that lay upon the life of each, and the red deeds that lay upon their souls.

Yes, there was one who suspected one of the two.

It was Guy Stanhope.

Knowing Don Diablo, from having met him the night of the capture of the schooner on the Florida coast, and seeing him at the Villa del Florida, he felt assured that the person who sat so quietly near him was the chief.

His suspicions he did not even make known to Lieutenant Warburton, who sat at his side, for having arrived in port, and delivered the schooner over to the authorities, the officers

were awaiting the sailing of the packet to New Orleans, to return home, and had taken up their quarters at the hotel.

Watching the chief narrowly Midshipman Stanhope came to the conclusion that it was indeed the pirate, and that he was playing some deep game, appearing in the dress of a Mexican gentleman.

Yet why was it that the famous pirate was in close intimacy with a Mexican officer of distinction, and who held the authority vested in Major Navaro, whom Guy Stanhope had met?

That puzzled him to find out, and he whispered to Lieutenant Warburton:

"See if you can catch Major Navaro's eye."

The lieutenant knew that the midshipman had some deep motive, and presently the Mexican looked over toward them, and bowed pleasantly to the American, who returned it cordially.

Don Diablo also looked up, yet though he met the eye of Guy Stanhope fixed upon him, and recognized him, he showed not the slightest sign to betray him, and again the midshipman was puzzled.

"Hurry through breakfast, lieutenant," said in a low tone Guy Stanhope to Warburton, and readily obeying, the two soon after left the table.

"Who is that elder officer you bowed to, Navaro?" asked Don Diablo.

"An American lieutenant of the navy; Warburton is his name, and he has brought in the vessel which the Mexican Government had built by the Americans especially to hunt you down, Diablo."

"My name is Nevil Vane; don't be a fool, major."

"True."

"I know the younger officer, for he was on the vessel I captured in Florida waters."

"I saw him watching you, and he doubtless recognized you."

"Or thinks he does; what a disappointment for him."

"But come, I am going out for a walk; will you join me?"

"Yes, come to my quarters."

In the meantime Guy Stanhope had gone to the hotel office and discovered that the one he believed was Don Diablo had registered as Nevil Vane, and the landlord told of the mistaken recognition of the morning.

This again puzzled the midshipman, and walking aside with Lieutenant Warburton he made known his suspicions.

"You must be mistaken, Guy, for he is with Major Navaro."

"True, sir; but did he and his lugger not both fool me in their disguises?"

"Yet he does not seem to be disguised."

"He is a bold man, as you know, and is evidently fooling the Mexican major; ah! there is Campas, the boatswain; how strange he should wish to remain in the Mexican service, when he seems at heart an American."

"Yes, he is a fine fellow and I would like to have had him with me; but he seems to have taken such a fancy to the schooner he hated to leave her, and indeed did I, for I fear I will never command her like again."

"Well, boatswain, how fares the Wizard?" and Lieutenant Warburton addressed Campas Caliente, who just then was near.

"Well, sir, though I must say I wish you were back on her."

"Campas, you told me you once saw the pirate chief, Don Diablo," said Guy Stanhope, eagerly.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you see that gentleman approaching?"

"Yes, sir," and the Cuban started as his eyes fell upon his chief.

"Well, he is registered as Mr. Nevil Vane, an American, and I say—"

"Pardon me, Mr. Stanhope, but he is startlingly like Don Diablo, yet I know him well."

"It is Mr. Nevil Vane, and, hearing he was in the city, I came here to see him."

"Well, Stanhope, what say you now?"

"That I was mistaken, that is all, lieutenant."

"Good-day, boatswain," and Guy Stanhope, thoroughly disappointed, turned away just as Don Diablo approached and spoke in a most friendly manner to Campas, the boatswain.

CHAPTER XL.

MAJOR NAVARO IN LUCK.

WHEN Don Diablo caught sight of Campas Caliente, no longer in his suit of a boatswain in the United States navy, but in the rig of an under officer of the same rank in the Mexican service, he was indeed glad to see him, and said, quickly, in a low tone:

"Meet me at Rafael's in two hours."

Engaged with an orderly, who had brought him dispatches, Major Navaro neither saw the seaman, or heard the greeting given him by Don Diablo, which the latter was exceedingly glad of, as the Mexican officer must have met Campas on the schooner, and observing that he was known to the chief, it would have at once excited his suspicious nature.

After rejoining Don Diablo, Major Navaro led

him to his own quarters, which were furnished with the greatest luxury, and calling a servant bade him bring wine and cigars.

"Your cigars I will smoke, your wine I will not drink, my dear major," said the chief, with his sweetest smile.

"What! do you suppose I would offer you an inferior quality?"

"Oh, no."

"What then?"

"I do not care for your wine."

"I am a good judge of all liquors."

"I do not doubt it, and of poisons, too," was the significant reply.

"Ah! you think I would poison you?"

"I know you to have done worse."

"Bah! you fear me."

"Oh, no, I fear death at your hands when I am off my guard."

"I am no assassin, Reno Quesala."

"Nevil Vane, my dear major."

"Well, by whatever name you care to be called, I say I am no assassin."

"Not my assassin, at least, though there are certain other tongues, if not silent, might tell a different story; this is a good cigar, major."

Fernando Navaro turned very pale but made no reply for the moment, and Don Diablo continued:

"You have elegant quarters here."

"Yes."

"You live extravagantly."

"Yes."

"Your pay is rather small for such luxury."

"I gamble."

"Ah!"

"Yes, and have lost heavily of late."

"Draw on the Government cash-box."

"I have."

"Borrow."

"I have."

"Borrow again."

"I dare not."

"Why?"

"It would cause men to suspect."

"True; it is unpleasant."

"It is, indeed."

"Do you owe much?"

"Some twenty thousand pesos."

"That is a small sum."

"To a man that gets his gold as you do, yes."

"The sea is open to you, too."

"I am no pirate."

"You are worse."

"What do you mean?"

"I risk my life for booty; you steal it without risk."

"You are plain, at least."

"I am truthful; but how much do you want me to lend you?"

"Did I ask you for money?"

"No, but you intend to."

"Well, give me thirty thousand."

"You said just now that twenty thousand covered your debts."

"True, but you thought it so small a sum I put on ten thousand more."

"I never lend, Major Navaro."

"Then give it to me."

"That is what it would amount to, so take me to your club to-night and we will have a game together, and you can win that sum from me."

"Can I trust you?"

"More thoroughly than I can you; now I must leave you, but I will call and dine with you."

"Adios, my dear Major Navaro."

With a smile Don Diablo took his departure, and at an easy pace walked down to the plaza, where he turned off into a by-street.

A walk of a few minutes brought him to an inn, over the door of which was a sign with an anchor upon it, and beneath it the words:

"El Brigatina."

Turning into the door that led to the drinking-saloon, where a number of sailors were drinking villainous *aguardiente*, Don Diablo stepped up to the bar where a Spaniard was in attendance and said, quietly:

"How is Señor Rafael of El Brigatina?"

"Ho, señor, you are welcome; follow me!" said the Spaniard, in a low tone, and he led his visitor into a back room where Campas Caliente was discovered seated at a table, a bottle of good wine and a tray of wafers before him.

He arose at the coming of the chief and motioned him to a seat, at the same time saying:

"More wine, Rafael, and remember the kind."

"Stolen fruit is sweetest, señor, and you shall have that which never had a peso of duty paid on the bottle."

The wine was soon brought, with more wafers, and Don Diablo asked:

"What news, Rafael?"

"All is quiet here, señor, but I have feared for you, as the cruisers are as thick on the sea as padres at a feast."

"True, but I do not fear them, or at least will not soon."

"Have you a few good men to spare me?"

"Yes, señor, the Señor Campas here knows them all that I have in view as good *camaradas*."

"Very well, we will need them soon."

The Spaniard departed, but as he reached the door, Don Diablo called to him:

"Say, good Rafael, have you cut the ears off of your walls since last I was here?"

"Yes, señor, a knife in the heart deadens the hearing, and the spy who heard then sleeps now, so have no fear," and Rafael's remark was significant enough to bring a smile of perfect understanding to the face of the chief, while he remarked, pleasantly:

"Yes, Rafael, dead men tell no tales."

CHAPTER XLI.

GLAD TIDINGS AND BAD TIDINGS.

"WELL, Campas, you see I have kept my word and joined you in Vera Cruz," said Don Diablo, after Rafael had left him alone with Campas Caliente.

"Yes, chief, and I was startled to see you come so boldly without disguise."

"Boldness is half a battle often, Campas."

"But you are known to many here, señor."

"True, Don Diablo is well known; but if Nevil Vane, an American, resembles him greatly, what can be said?"

"I fear they may get a proof of who you are that it would be impossible to evade."

"No, no, not with the great Major Fernando Navaro my friend."

"Well, señor, you know best what chances you can take; but the young American midshipman, the Señor Guy Stanhope, who joined us at Havana, recognized you."

"He thought he did."

"He did do so, and spoke to me of you; but I said you were the Señor Nevil Vane, and that I knew you, and he gave up his idea."

"You did well, good Campas; but that is a gallant young officer, and a dangerous one."

"He is a noble young man, señor; I met him in Havana in company with Don Isodoro Sabinas, and Major Enrique Alvarado, of the Governor-General's staff, and my worst foe, and I was recognized as Caliente the Conspirator."

"The three returned, and the Spanish major was determined to arrest me, but left it to Midshipman Stanhope if I was an American."

"I saw that he too recognized me, for I had done him a good turn once, but he spoke to me as he would to a stranger, and Major Alvarado was compelled to be satisfied."

"But he followed me to Vique's, and you saw his body in the Tribunal Hall."

"Yes, and you did right to get rid of a troublesome enemy, Campas; this young Stanhope came on the schooner with you then?"

"Yes, señor chief; he goes back with her officers to the United States."

"You found her a stanch craft and fast sailer?"

"A marvel, señor."

"And Lieutenant Warburton has turned her over to the authorities?"

"Yes, señor, and her captain is on board, and, by the way, is a great friend of Major Navaro."

"Indeed! his name?"

"Martinez Castellar."

"Ah! I know him as an old enemy, and he is a fine sailor and good fighter."

"He has that reputation, señor."

"And his crew?"

"All but three are my men, señor."

"Well done, Campas; how many have you on board?"

"Eighty."

"Good! and her officers?"

"Have not all arrived."

"When is she expected to sail?"

"It is said within two weeks, but I know orders have been given Captain Castellar to sail when he pleases, after he has received his full complement of officers and men."

"Well, I can get a score more men from Malo, at the Wizard's Cavern."

"That will give you a hundred."

"Yes, and enough."

"You will need a large crew, chief, for you are not very sparing of men I have heard," said Campas Caliente, with a smile.

"True, I use them; but I take the same chances they do."

"I do not doubt it; now what do you propose, señor?"

"To sail the third night from this."

"I will be ready."

"You get all in readiness, and have your men you are not certain of below decks."

"I will, señor."

"Late at night I will come on board with Navaro, and—"

"I would not compromise him, señor, for he may be useful at some future time."

"True; well, I will give out that I, Nevil Vane, leave on the packet-ship, which sails at midnight on that night, and none will suspect me."

"Then I will work certain dispatches, through Rafael here, as to get Navaro on board in consultation with Captain Castellar, and then I will, in disguise, row out from the shore and the schooner will be ours."

"What think you?"

"A good plan, chief; but why Major Navaro on board?"

"Just to give him a little surprise; I will not appear to know him, before Captain Castellar."

and, after passing the Castle San Juan d'Uloa will send them back in my shore boat."

"As you please, señor chief."

"Now, Campas, one question?"

"Well, señor?"

"You remember the schooner overhauled my lugger?"

"Yes, señor."

"And Midshipman Stanhope boarded?"

"Yes, chief, and most cleverly you deceived him."

"I sent him after the *goleta*."

"Telling him Don Diablo was on board."

"Yes; did the schooner come up with the *goleta*?"

"She did."

"And capture her?" asked Don Diablo, with some excitement.

"She sunk her."

"Hal with all on board?"

"No, señor chief; there was one who did not go down with the *goleta*."

"And who was that?"

"Captain Alma."

"*Nombre de Dios!*"

"It is true, señor."

"She was saved?" and the chief's brow grew black.

"Yes, señor, though she tried hard to die."

"How mean you?"

"She would not strike the flag, and as we had so few men on the schooner, Lieutenant Warburton would not board; besides he could not risk injury to the Wizard, so we poured in our fire, and yet Captain Alma would not strike her flag."

"She showed pluck," said Don Diablo, in admiration of the courage of the woman.

"I never saw nobler bravery, señor."

"Well, go on, Campas."

"When an offer was made by the American officer to pardon those who surrendered, Captain Alma—"

"Hal such an offer was made?"

"Yes, señor."

"And some accepted?"

"Half a dozen or so, but they signed their death-warrant in doing so."

"How mean you?"

"Captain Alma shot them dead."

"By the Cross! did she do that?"

"Yes, señor, she would not allow any to surrender, and more, having escaped uninjured, sought to kill herself, but was saved by Midshipman Stanhope."

"Curse the boy! why did he meddle?"

"He saved her life, while I, knowing that one wounded man, English Jack, as we knew him, would tell all he knew, if carried on the schooner, made his wound fatal by driving my knife into his heart."

"You did well, Campas."

"It was a hard deed to do, señor; but better hasten his end than have a hundred brave fellows, whatever their crimes may be, swing from his treachery, and he was a dangerous man."

"I am glad he is dead; now as to Alma?"

"She was taken on board the schooner, and only one knew her to be other than she appeared, a young officer."

"Well?"

"Midshipman Stanhope knew to the contrary."

"That accursed boy again."

"He kept her secret, and the night we reached port she escaped."

"Hal!"

"Yes, chief, she dropped from the port and swam ashore, it was said, but I believe that Midshipman Stanhope aided her escape."

"Ah! well, he has set a tigress on my track."

"I fear so, chief, for I overheard her swear on the *goleta* to kill you."

"Her cause for so doing, Campas?" coolly asked Don Diablo.

"Midshipman Stanhope told her of your carrying off the *Señorita Sabinas*."

"Oh, curses on that boy, and the woman, too."

"I fear she will harm you, señor."

"I know she will, if—she gets the chance."

"You will have to be wary, for she is in town."

"How know you?"

"I saw her to-day, on my way down from the hotel."

"Saw her?"

"Yes, señor, and she was dressed in her feminine attire."

"Did she see you?"

"No, chief."

"Well, I must go and lock her up; remember, the third night from this, and I shall come late, as I have been invited by a friend of Major Navaro's to attend a masquerade fandango, and I shall go."

"Adios, my good Campas," and dashing off his last glass of wine, Don Diablo left the room and the house, in a very good humor at the glad tidings he had heard regarding the schooner, and very angry at the bad tidings, to him, of Alma Aubrey's escape from the *goleta*.

CHAPTER XLII.

A DOUBLE SUMMONS.

TRUE to his promise, Major Fernando Navaro took Don Diablo, as Nevil Vane, a wealthy

American, to the club at night, after entertaining him with a most sumptuous dinner at his rooms.

And, true to his pledge, Don Diablo allowed the Mexican to win from him at *monté* the sum which he said he would not lend him.

The cool indifference of the supposed wealthy American at his losses wholly won the hearts of the Mexicans present, and by noon the following day Nevil Vane was the *fêted* lion of Vera Cruz, and cards of invitation flowed in upon him from every quarter.

But the Señor Vane regretted his inability to accept the pressing pleadings to dinner and tea from the old Dons and Duennas with marriageable daughters, as he must leave in the packet for New Orleans, his passage having been already engaged.

Yet there was one entertainment he was pledged to attend, and that was the masquerade ball to which he had been invited by an intimate friend of Major Navaro.

As for the Mexican officer, he was only too anxious to have Don Diablo shown around, for the rumors of his striking likeness to the celebrated pirate chief were floating on every breeze, and it was his desire to so fortify himself with all who met the buccaneer that, should the crash of exposure come, he would be considered as imposed upon with the others.

What the chief was doing in Vera Cruz all his spies could not discover, and why he was going on the packet-ship to New Orleans, also puzzled the major.

But that he was going he felt assured, as the chief had engaged passage for himself; this he knew.

And to throw the major off his guard, Don Diablo had communicated with Campas Caliente, and gotten him to look up a man answering to him in personal appearance, and who could speak English fluently.

Such a personage the boatswain discovered in a tall, handsome Englishman, who, with a little brownning up and staining of the hair and mustache would pass very well for Don Diablo.

This man was sent to report at the hotel to the chief, who inspected him critically, and apparently satisfied, rigged him out with clothing and baggage, ordered him to try and make up as much like him as possible, and gave him a generous sum of gold, with instructions to go on board the packet-ship about midnight, of her night for sailing, and play Nevil Vane through-out.

"This will protect that devil Navaro too, by proving that his friend *did* sail on the packet, and was not Don Diablo, as some might believe, and he will be useful to me at another time."

Such were the thoughts of the chief, and he laughed at the thought of also deceiving Guy Stanhope, by palming off a substitute for himself.

Having arranged all his plans, Don Diablo attended the masquerade thoroughly disguised, though there were a number of fair *señoritas* present who felt sure they would recognize the rich American by his superb form and *distingué* air, and in whose romantic heads, he was the more admired on account of his mysterious resemblance to the noted pirate chieftain, whose name was such a terror on sea and land.

The ball was certainly a grand success, and it was with the greatest regret that Major Navaro received a summons from Captain Castellar, of the new Mexican schooner-of-war, *Black Wizard*, to come on board at once, as he wished to see him upon an important matter.

Of course the major dared not disregard such a summons from such a source, and departed, yet with deepest regret at the pleasures left behind.

All night he had been striving to discover how Don Diablo was dressed, but each time he thought he had penetrated his disguise he found he was mistaken, and he left the ball convinced that the chief had not attended.

To convince himself on this score he strode by the hotel on his way to the shore, and learned that the American señor, Nevil Vane, had already gone on board the packet-ship.

Inquiry at the quay of the vessel convinced the inquisitive major that Don Diablo, believed to be Nevil Vane, was asleep in his berth on board the packet, so he continued on his way to the schooner-of-war, muttering to himself:

"That Don Diablo is playing some deep game by coming here; but what it is, I cannot discover."

"Well, I am thirty thousand pesos in by his coming, and can see no way of being detected as his friend—bah! his friend! I mean his—his ally."

While the gallant major, whose dark deeds were so thoroughly kept under a bushel from the eye of the public, was en route to the quay, a man was standing in the window of the house in which the ball had been given looking at the dancers.

He had seen the major depart, and then, for the first time entered the ball-room.

But hardly had he engaged in one dance, when a slender form came up to him and whispered in his ear.

The lad was in a handsome sailor suit, representing a reefer in the Mexican navy, and his

face was concealed by a mask; but the one he whispered to heard distinctly the words:

"The Señor Campas says do not delay, but come at once."

And out of the room the two went together, the tall man in the uniform of a Mexican general, and with his face masked, and the lad in the reefer's suit.

"You come from the Señor Campas, my lad?"

"Yes, señor."

"He is anxious to be off then, fearing some danger?"

"He is, señor."

"You are one of the crew?"

"Yes, señor."

"Who were you told to seek?"

"Yourself, señor chief."

"And how knew you me?"

"He told me you would be dressed as a Mexican general."

"Ah yes; then come, and to-morrow yonder revelers will learn of that which will astound them, and cause them to dread still more the name of—"

The chief paused, and the lad added:

"The name of Don Diablo, señor."

CHAPTER XLIII.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

WHEN Major Fernando Navaro arrived on board the Mexican schooner-of-war *Black Wizard*, he found Captain Castellar anxiously awaiting him, to place before him some information received from a sailor who reported that he was skipper of a polacca that had come in an hour or so before.

The skipper had said he was chased in from Tampico, by a swift-sailing lugger, carrying the well-known and much-dreaded flag of Don Diablo, the pirate, but had saved his vessel by running inshore into shallow water.

"You know, Major Navaro, that though I have my crew on board, excepting the marines, I have but one officer to aid me, the others that are ordered to report to me having not yet arrived, being absent on a cruise in another vessel."

"But if you can spare me some soldiers, and one or two artillery officers to command the guns, I will, with my lieutenant, run out at once after this noted pirate, and render a good account of myself."

"You shall have the men, my dear captain, and several good officers too, and I will send at once for them, and await here their arrival," was the ready answer of the Major-Commandante of Vera Cruz.

The messenger was called and dispatched to the shore on his mission, and then Major Navaro, governed by his ruling passion, suggested a game of cards to kill time, until the arrival of the soldiers.

Captain Castellar willingly consented, and leaving the Mexican lieutenant in charge of the deck, the two officers retired to the cabin for their game of cards.

So wrapped were they in the excitement of losing and winning, for they were playing for high stakes, and were alternately in good and ill-luck, they failed to observe a form coming out of the shadow of the cabin, and approaching the table where they sat.

The new-comer trod noiselessly, seemingly gliding, rather than walking, and his appearance was enough to excite horror in any one gazing upon him.

From head to foot he was dressed in brightest scarlet.

But, strangest of all the suit fitted his form closely, and he had huge wings, armed with sharp claws, extended out from the back on either side.

His feet ran off to a point, upon which was a claw, and his long fingers were similarly ornamented, while two horns, black as ebony, projected from each temple.

His eyes were black and piercing, his nose hooked, sharp and long, his teeth white and glittering, and his hair, a sickly green, rose up in a ridge along the center of his head.

Across one arm was a long, forked tail carelessly thrown, and in his right hand he carried a black pitchfork, that might become a very dangerous weapon.

Nearer and nearer this hideous being, this diabolical visitor, seemingly from the infernal regions, crept to the two gamblers, and then, unnoticed still by them, bent an earnest gaze upon the game.

"Make it a thousand pesos, Major Navaro, and I will play another game," said Captain Castellar.

"Let us say two thousand, señor."

"No, you are too high for me, and if I lose that much it will severely cramp me."

"Well, make it a thousand," responded the major.

"Gentlemen, make souls the stakes, and permit me to join your little game."

The deep voice breaking in upon their quietude, startled them; but the hideous being bending over them with grinning face and pitchfork ready, alarmed them to that extent, that their superstitious natures were excited fearfully,

and though both arose in terror, they sunk back in their chairs unable to fly from what they believed in reality to be Satan himself!

CHAPTER XLIV.

A CHANGE OF FLAGS.

FOR a moment neither Major Navaro nor Captain Castellar could utter a word, other than the exclamation of horror that arose to their lips, upon making the startling discovery of who was their unwelcome visitor.

Then the cool effrontery of the Mexican army officer, and his courage, for he was certainly no coward, whatever his crimes might be, asserted themselves, and he said in a firm voice:

"Who are you?"

"Satan!"

The deep response was not a reply that either gentleman coveted; but Major Navaro replied: "Nonsense! What means this silly masquerading?"

"It is no silly masquerading, Major Fernando Navaro, as you will find out."

"Ha! I should know that voice," cried the major.

"I tell you that I was Satan; now I tell you, señors, that I am Don Diablo, and you are my prisoners."

Both men now uttered angry exclamations, and they would have thrown themselves bodily upon the intruder, but he waved them back, and said sternly:

"Behold! if you value your lives utter no loud word, or you die."

They glanced in the direction in which he pointed, and across the whole back of the cabin beheld, in the dim light, a line of seamen, all with firearms leveled upon them.

"There is some shameful work in all this," cried Major Navaro, excitedly.

"Don't agitate yourself needlessly, my dear major, for it will do no good, and your life, and that of Captain Castellar, are not in danger; but your vessel is in my power."

"*Madre de Dios!* can this be true?" groaned the gallant captain.

"As true as that you stand there, Captain Castellar."

"This is fearful."

"For you, and the major here, it is a sad blow, señor captain; but for me it is a stroke of good fortune."

"You see I have had a run of bad luck of late, and I needed a vessel I could run from my foes in, catch any craft afloat, and also fight off a cruiser with."

"To secure such a vessel I sent an officer to the United States, where they build the fleetest crafts that fly the seas, and he discovered this one, learned who it was for, and when the schooner dropped anchor here, you shipped for seamen my crew."

"*Nombre de Dios!*" burst from the lips of the almost broken-hearted naval officer, while Major Navaro muttered a curse through his shut teeth.

"It is true, señors; and more, to get you, Major Navaro, on board, I had one of my men play skipper of a polacca, and tell a story of Don Diablo being in the offing, and of course Captain Castellar sent for you."

"And, while you have been gambling, and you, major, cheating as is your custom, I have been quietly taking possession of this splendid vessel, and now hold you prisoners."

Another groan from the two men brought a smile upon the scarlet-painted face of Don Diablo, and he continued:

"Have no fear, for as soon as I run out of the reach of the guns of that old stone pile of misery, the San Juan d'Uloa, I will ship you two, señors, back to your fair city, to tell how cleverly Don Diablo got possession of the Black Wizard."

With a word to his men to keep the two officers in the cabin, Don Diablo went on deck, and gave orders to get the anchor up.

Campas Caliente, a thorough seaman, already had everything in readiness, and the fleet schooner, so cleverly and daringly captured, was flying from the harbor under a cloud of canvas.

Recognizing her the castle fired no shot across her bows, and soon after she had gained a safe offing and lay to upon the dark waters.

"Now, señors, there is a shore boat alongside, and yonder lies D'Uloa, so you cannot miss getting back, for you, Captain Castellar, know the lights."

"A pleasant trip, señors, and thank your Government from me for its beautiful present of this schooner."

With angry faces, yet glad of their escape from the clutches of the chief, and in silence, the two officers went over the gangway into the waiting boat, and seizing the oars Captain Castellar pulled toward the castle, a league away, while the schooner was suddenly illumined by a blue light, and up to her peak went the black flag of the buccaneer.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE CABIN-BOY.

WHEN the going out of the blue light left the schooner once more in gloom, Don Diablo turn-

ed to Campas Caliente, his first lieutenant, and said:

"Señor, douse every light on the Wizard, and run for the mountain retreat, while I go into the cabin and get off this masquerading costume."

"Yes, you are devil enough without the need of horns and claws."

This startling truism was spoken by a slenderly-formed person who suddenly glided down into the cabin, and disappeared from the sight of the astonished Don Diablo and his no less amazed lieutenant.

"By the cross, but that cabin-boy of yours, Señor Caliente, will be food for fishes if he gives vent to his thoughts in that style."

"He may think what he pleases, and I cannot but agree with him in his views regarding me, but he must keep those ideas to himself," said Don Diablo, too thoroughly delighted with his new vessel, secured for him by Campas Caliente, to punish the lad as he felt inclined.

"He is not my protégé, señor captain, for I would not have brought a boy on board."

"Not of your shipping, Campas! Then who, pray, did ship him?"

"I certainly thought you did, chief, as he came on board with you."

"True, but he was the same youth whom you sent to me at the ball."

"I do not understand you, señor."

"Did you not send that lad to me at the masquerade to-night?"

"I did not, señor."

"To bid me hasten on board?"

"No, señor."

"Campas Caliente!"

"Señor Don Diablo!"

"Are you trifling with me?"

"Upon my life, no."

"Then what does it mean?"

"I am in utter ignorance to what you refer, chief."

"At the ball, shortly after Major Navaro departed to come on board this schooner, a youth, that one who came with me in the boat, walked up to me and said you bade him come after me."

"I sent no such message, sir."

"Of course I obeyed, and he came on board with me."

"That I saw, señor, and believed he was your protégé."

"No, sir, but I will find out whose he is, and who and what he may be," and Don Diablo angrily strode down into the cabin.

At the table sat the cabin-boy who had so insolently addressed the dreaded chief upon his own deck.

He was dressed in his sailor suit of reefer, and his head was bent down over a book, so that Don Diablo did not see his face when he entered.

But going up to him he seized him by the shoulder and rudely raised him upon his feet, at the same time saying angrily:

"Well, boy, who and what are you?"

The face was now raised to meet the burning eyes of the chief, and with an exclamation Don Diablo started back, a name upon his lips:

"Alma!"

"Yes, Reno Quesala, I am Alma Aubrey, whom you sought to desert for another, one more beautiful than am I, but whom one day you would cast aside as you did me, were you to live to do so."

"Alma, this is nonsense," and Don Diablo, for the first time in his life was cowed, and by a woman.

"Is it?"

"Indeed it is, for you know I did not desert you."

"What?"

"I sent you to the Wreckers' Isle, and there I expected to join you as soon as I captured this schooner."

"In your face, Reno Quesala, I fling the lie, for you hoped I would be sunk in the *goleta*."

"But I have lived to disappoint you, and I tell you, red-handed man that you are, the crushed worm has turned upon the one who so long trod it under heel, and I strike for revenge."

She sprung upon him as she spoke, a long, slender blade in her hand, and with the rapidity of the lightning's flash struck at his heart.

But the blade shivered to atoms against some hard object, and, with unmoved face, although she had been too quick for him to avoid or prevent the blow, he placed his hand beneath his scarlet garb, and drew out a small miniature, while he said in cool, cutting tones:

"Alma Aubrey, see what has saved my life from your hand."

"She gave it me but three nights ago."

Pallid, trembling, unnerved at her failure, Alma Aubrey stood before the sneering, fearless man, the picture of woe and fury; but her eyes fell upon the miniature, a likeness in a gem-studded medallion setting, and she hissed forth:

"Reno Quesala, who is that woman?"

"Her name was Nita Sabinas; she is now my wife."

The woman tried hard to speak, her eyes

glowed, and she stretched forth her hands as if in mortal anguish or in pathetic pleading.

A picture of misery she stood an instant before the splendid-looking demon, and then, with her lips moving, yet uttering no word, she sunk in a heap upon the floor of the cabin.

And not one look of pity crossed the man's face, and his tones were heartless as he said:

"Don Diablo, again you owe your life to Nita Sabinas."

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE COMBAT.

WHEN Alma Aubrey returned to consciousness, after her deathlike swoon, she shuddered, for her slender wrists and ankles were in irons, and she was confined in the prison pit of the schooner.

For awhile she could hardly realize the true situation she was in, or that Don Diablo had proven himself so inhuman as to treat her like a mad animal.

But at last it came upon her in all its vivid misery, and she burst into an agony of weeping.

But in that desolate place none heard her cries of anguish, and if hearing them were too well used to sights of suffering, both mental and physical, to heed them.

At last a visitor entered her dreary prison, for it was nothing more.

A visitor with a heart of adamant, and a face as cruel as a tiger's.

He brought her a cot to sleep on, a jug of water, some food, and left her without a word.

And thus the hours passed, and they made days and nights, and still only her cruel-faced jailer came near her.

She knew that the schooner had been flying over the waves for hours, and again it was rolling lazily in a calm; then came a storm, and then the anchor was dropped and she felt that they were in some port.

Again the fleet vessel was at sea, riding the waves, and then a form entered her prison.

In the dim light she saw it was not her jailer.

By the light of a dark lantern he opened, she beheld the face of Don Diablo, and it was cruel, hard and triumphant.

By the lantern's light he too saw her face, and it was like that of a corpse, lines of suffering were drawn upon it, and the bright eyes were sunken.

"Well, my intended murderess, how like you your quarters?" he asked, with a sneer.

"The grave is preferable," was her quiet response.

"The grave, a grave at the bottom of the sea, will be the next change you make from here, Alma."

"I care not how soon the change come."

"You seem indifferent to your fate."

"I am wholly so."

"Do you not fear to die?"

"I fear to live."

"Ah! you dread misery of soul and anguish of body."

"I dread heart-pain, that is all, Reno Quesala."

"Well, now I know what will make you feel, let me tell you that I sailed from Vera Cruz to my retreat on the Mexican coast, to find that an American cruiser had been there and destroyed my lugger, having been piloted into the bay by a traitor."

"I was nearly frantic from dread that one I loved had been lost to me forever; but I found her hiding in a cavern with her maid, and one who had taken her there; my faithful, deformed Coocha."

"With joy in my heart I brought her on my vessel, and now I am happy, for, as I told you, Alma, she is my wife."

"Poor, unhappy woman," was all that came from the lips of the cruelly-tortured being who had become Don Diablo's victim of bitter hate.

"I tried to keep you two from meeting, Alma," resumed the chief.

"But you would be jealous, and see how it has ended."

"You know that my beautiful bride is on board my vessel, and that her presence makes me happy; but she little knows my secret, and that I hold you here in irons."

"And she shall never know."

"Poor woman."

"You are the one to be pitied, Alma."

"No, I am nearer death than she is, and I would welcome the grim destroyer with all my heart, while, knowing that ere long life must end, makes me too divinely happy, Reno Quesala."

He seemed disappointed and angry that he could not wring from her pleadings and tears, and with a bitter oath he closed the dark lantern and turned away, leaving her again alone.

When he was gone her brave, proud heart seemed to sink within her, and she became almost unconscious.

But suddenly she was aroused by an excitement on deck, and she heard ringing orders in Don Diablo's voice to set sail.

Then the schooner seemed fairly to bound from wave to wave, so rapidly did it fly away,

until suddenly loud orders were given, and it went about, while the deep boom of a cannon was heard, and the striking of a shot followed.

From keel to trunk the schooner shuddered, as her guns opened; but it was a running fight the poor woman knew, and she was aware that Don Diablo had met more than his match.

And louder and louder the guns roared in the distance, and those on the schooner answered rapidly, while the crashing of iron upon the deck and rigging of the beautiful vessel told that she was suffering severely under the enemy's fire.

Then too, came the groans of wounded men, and following came voices in ringing command. What could it mean?

A minute after told the story, for the schooner again went about, and from another quarter came the roar of heavy guns, mingling with those already pouring a hot fire upon the buccaneer craft.

Between the two fires the schooner suffered fearfully, the shot tore up her decks and through her hull, her rigging was splintered, her sails cut to fragments, and her crew, fighting bravely, died one by one, until their blood trickled through the rents and dropped upon the woman.

She knew that a fearful, desperate battle was in progress, that the fierce chief was fighting to the bitter end, and she wondered how it all would terminate.

That she would soon know, for there came the thrilling cry of:

"Boarders, follow me!"

Then heavy falls upon the deck, the rattle of pistols, and clash of cutlasses, and next cries for quarter.

Then Alma Aubrey knew that the fight had ended, and that the schooner had been captured, and she felt that the beginning of her revenge had come.

CHAPTER XLVII.

ALMA'S REVENGE.

THOUGH in darkness, and below decks, Alma Aubrey had rightly judged each phase of the battle, from the flight of the schooner, when caught on a lee shore by a large adversary, to the coming to the aid of the cruiser a second foe that soon ended the combat.

Up to the last Don Diablo had fought with the fury of a demon; but his crew cried for quarter, when they saw that all was wholly lost and they but a handful remaining to cope with adversaries vastly outnumbering them, and the chief was left alone.

No, not alone, for his loved wife clung to him, his deformed slave was by his side, and Alena was on her knees, grasping the dress of her mistress.

It was a sad, yet grand picture, to see the yet defiant chief thus face his foes.

But he laid his sword at his feet, to save the woman he really loved, and a few moments after he was in irons.

And Alma Aubrey?

Found in her loathsome prison pit, and believed to be a captive of the pirate, she was carried on the American brig-of-war that had captured the schooner, and most kindly cared for by the officers, while poor Nita, refusing to leave her husband, remained by his side below decks, and did all in her power to soothe his sorrows.

At length the brig-of-war, with the crippled schooner in tow, and her prisoners, set sail for Santiago, the nearest port, to repair damages, for the pirate had hit some hard blows, to enable her to continue on to Havana with Don Diablo, who, having been taken in Cuban waters, was to be given up to Spain for punishment.

Wild with excitement over the capture of the noted Don Diablo, the citizens of Santiago extended to the American officers every courtesy, and in return, when the brig was ready for sea, a gala entertainment was given on board, and, unmindful of the sad hearts of those in irons, the cavaliers and señoritas danced merrily to the strains of sweet music.

But from this scene, where she was not known other than as a captive of the pirates, Alma Aubrey crept away unobserved, and descended to the deck below.

Making her way aft, unnoticed, for the sailors were busy on deck watching the dancers, she came to the place where Don Diablo was confined.

Moodily he sat upon a gun, his wrists and ankles ironed heavily, and by his side the wretched, sorrowing Nita, while near by was the deformed Coocha, and the octoroon, Alena.

"Reno Quesala, I have come for my revenge."

Don Diablo started at the words, and in the dim light recognized who it was that spoke to him.

"Do your worst, only spare her sorrow," he answered, sternly.

"What have you against my husband, señor?" and Nita turned to the woman, whom, still in her masculine attire, she believed to be a youth.

"More than the tears of angels can ever wash out," was the bitter reply.

"Now, Don Diablo, hold forth your hands," she said, sternly.

He did not obey, and bending over, while Nita watched her carefully, she quickly unlocked his irons.

"*Nombre de Dios!* what does this mean?" cried the chief, in utter amazement.

"It means that you are free; here is a rope, so you can lower yourself from this open port into the sea; your slave I also release, and you two can carry your wife and her maid."

"Quick! for you have no time to lose."

"Your guard has already deserted, and a small shallop awaits you a cable's length astern; go!"

Don Diablo tried to detain her; but she had already unlocked the irons from Coocha's feet and hands, and glided away.

He dared not call aloud to her, and, acting with promptness, as he always did in danger, he seized the rope and lowered Nita, wondering, silent and hoping, noiselessly into the water.

Next followed the octoroon, then Coocha, and last himself.

The feet of the merry dancers on the deck, and strains of music, destroyed all other sounds, and, unnoticed by the watch, the four swam away upon the dark waters.

A cable's length distant a little shallop was lying to, and upon this the four fugitives soon stood; a man was at the helm, another ready to set all sail, and a minute after a six-knot breeze was driving the craft seaward.

Thus did Alma Aubrey, the poor, deserted, cruelly-treated woman, have her revenge.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

RETROSPECTION.

KIND reader, those who kindly followed the romance of "Don Diablo, the Rivals of the Sea," to its end, will remember that the red-haired and black-hearted buccaneer chief escaped through many a scene of danger after his vessel was sunk by an American cruiser, and, in the Sea Gipsy, he so boldly captured from the rival corsair, Captain Waldron, he continued to dye the seas with the blood of his victims, until he was at last run down by Howard De Vigne, his own son, and, as was believed by all, slain and thrown into the sea with the dead of his crew.

The schooner that tracked the dreaded pirate to his end was a strange craft, indeed, for, from hull to topmast, she was red, although otherwise the twin craft, or sister vessel, of the Sea Gipsy.

And, in the mad battle, Howard De Vigne, who commanded the Red Schooner, believed he had revenged the cruel death of his mother at the hands of his own father.

And so thought another person on the Red Schooner, for, from him, he believed, had come the shot that had laid the chief low in death.

That other person was supposed to be a cabin-boy; but in reality was a woman, and none other than the once loving, beautiful and trusting Nita Sabinas.

When at last she could no longer be blind to the fact that she was but the plaything for a short year of Don Diablo, the hot blood in the veins of Nita Sabinas, the Cuban maiden, turned to fire and her jealousy was aroused in all its might.

But when, one day, Don Diablo visited her in her retreat in Havana, and told her boastfully that he had killed her brother and her father, who had steadily tracked him to seek revenge, her love began to turn to hate.

And bitter indeed became that hatred, when she discovered that the man for whom she had sacrificed everything in life, had deserved her to try and run down other fair game.

Then it was her love turned wholly to a desire for revenge as firm as ever was felt in the heart of an Indian, and to seek that revenge she made the one aim, one object of her life.

With her to decide was to act, and setting out upon her task, she first visited the convent, where Don Diablo had told her with a sneer love for him had driven Alma Aubrey, and from her lips, then a devoted sister of the church, she heard the story of her wrongs.

Then, step by step, she unraveled the threads of Don Diablo's crime-stained life, and believed at last she had ended that career when she saw him fall, and she fell severely wounded upon deck, in the conflict between the Sea Gipsy and the Red Schooner.

But Don Diablo was as cunning as a fox, and when he saw that all hope was gone, that his crew was beaten, and his vessel in the hands of his bitterest foe, his own son, he fell like one dead upon the deck, and, with the dead was thrown into the sea.

Not far away was the land, and he was a bold swimmer, and, as he breasted the waves, he swore that the world should again hear of Don Diablo.

How he kept that oath the following chapters will show.

And poor Nita Sabinas, the supposed cabin-boy of the Red Schooner?

For long weeks she lay hovering between life and death, and tenderly cared for by Lucille

Marsden, until at last she came back to life and health.

And then into her heart crept a longing to revisit the home and scenes of her childhood; the grand old villa that Time was leaving deep foot-prints upon.

Bidding farewell to her kind friends, with a sad heart, she took passage in a vessel bound for South America, and which was to touch at Havana, once more trusting herself upon the treacherous sea, so long the theater of the red deeds of the one man she had loved on earth, and who had so cruelly brought only anguish upon her.

With a fair breeze the good ship sailed away; but, alas! never to reach the destined port.

CHAPTER XLIX.

OUT OF THE DEPTHS.

DAYLIGHT dying from the skies, and the gloom of approaching night falling upon the waters.

A rosy tint and the last glimmer of sunset struggling in the west, and in the east a bank of storm-clouds, rushing higher, like legions of black, charging steeds, rushing to overwhelm a foe.

The waves of the sea rough and foam-crested, from the effects of the late tempest, and tossing about here and there, buffeted by wind and waters, the only object visible upon the broad expanse of the restless, mighty ocean—a wreck, dismantled and sinking slowly down into the depths.

The masts had been wrnched short off by the hurricane, her bulwarks were battered, and every object that could be swept away, had disappeared.

Presently, out of the cabin came a human form, that of a woman.

A woman, and yet one whose years had not been many, though there were deep traces of their having been sorrowful years, stamped upon a face that was yet most beautiful.

She was dressed in a serviceable suit, and her hair was short, and clustering in ringlets around her neck and temples.

Glancing westward she saw the rosy hue left by the setting sun, and then, as the low rumble of thunder caught her ears, she quickly turned her gaze toward the east.

"Another tempest, and this old hulk already nearly battered to pieces, and I alone of those who sailed in her spared, for those who left in the boats I know must have been lost."

"Ah me! why was I spared?"

"No vessel in sight, no land in sight; only the storm coming on to send me to my death—Ah! there is land!" and her eyes were turned upon the dark line on the horizon.

Gradually the light faded and shut out the land, and nearer and nearer came the howling tempest.

Still on drifted the wreck, directly landward, and nearer and nearer rushed the destroying, chaotic mass of wind and waters.

Alarmed by the shrieking winds, the roar of waters and the vivid flash of lightning, the woman ran back into the cabin, just as the wreck was seized in the very teeth of the tempest, and hurled onward with frightful velocity.

Onward and onward the wreck was driven, until presently, it made one mighty leap in the darkness, and came down with a fearful shock upon a hidden reef of rock, while the waves broke over the devoted craft.

But the stout hull withstood the fierce shock, and the winds swept harmlessly by, while the waves only cast the spray upon the high stern, and the woman began to hope that she might yet be spared.

All through the night she watched, waited and prayed, for she cared not to be dashed to pieces upon the rocks, and with the first glimmer of dawn went on deck.

The sea was yet white with foam, and the waves rolled in fiercely and with fearful roar; but the wind was going down, and hope sprung up in her heart, for beyond her was land.

Bold, rugged, forbidding, it was; but yet it was land, and hence a refuge.

Thankful for this discovery and worn out with her long exposure to danger, hardship and watching, she returned to the cabin, and throwing herself down upon a sofa sunk fast to sleep.

For several hours she slept a dreamless sleep of fatigue.

Then she awakened with a start, and a cry escaped her lips, for she was not alone.

Standing near her, gazing with respect, and yet with ardent admiration upon her were half a score of human beings.

They were rough-looking men, clad in blue woolen shirts, canvas pants, tarpaulins and heavy boots, and all of them wore a belt of arms.

Outlaws they must be; ay, wreckers, for the island was one of the Bahamas, where half a century ago, and long before, false beacons were set each night of storm to lure the richly-freighted vessel to destruction.

And yet these men gazed with respect upon a woman, the only being upon a wreck that had been driven by the cruel waves and wind upon their island.

And as they looked, she sprung to her feet

and glancing around upon them, said quickly:

"Men, who and what are you?"

"The Wreckers, señora, and members of the League."

"What league?" she asked, not comprehending them wholly.

"The Buccaneer League, señora, that acknowledges Don Diablo chief."

At that name the face of the woman turned pale, and she said, falteringly:

"You are the Bahama Wreckers, then?"

"Yes, señora," continued the spokesman.

"And this is one of the islands that this wreck has driven upon?"

"Yes, señorita."

"Then I need expect no more mercy than from wolves," she said, with scorn in her voice and look.

"Pardon, señorita, knowing you as we do, you are entitled to any respect that we can show," said the leader, reproachfully.

"Knowing me?" she asked, with surprise.

"Yes, lady."

"You do not know me."

"Yes, señorita."

"Who am I?"

"The Señorita Sabinas that was; now the wife of our chief," was the firm response.

"No, no, no! I am not his wife, for he is dead," she cried in a tone of deepest feeling, while up before her surged like a nightmare the whole buried past.

"Don Diablo dead, lady?" and the man asked the question with surprise.

"Yes."

"It is hard to believe, lady, for we Wreckers were broken up some time ago, and yet here we are."

"Then, Don Diablo has been killed so often, and yet lives?"

"I saw him die."

"Ah! then there can be no doubt."

"When and where was this, lady?"

"It was when his schooner, Sea Gipsy, was sunk by the Red Schooner, six months ago."

"Why, lady, have you not seen him since then?" asked the man, with evident surprise.

"How should I, when I say to you that he is dead?"

"No, lady, Don Diablo lives."

"No! no! no!"

"Yes, señora, he was here one week ago."

"What! Don Diablo lives! he is not dead! he was here one week ago!"

She fairly shrieked forth the words, and springing toward the speaker, grasped him firmly by the arm.

"I swear it, lady; he is again afloat on the seas, having retaken his Sea Gipsy from the Mexicans, who purchased her and the Red Schooner from the Americans."

"Not dead, and once more in the Sea Gipsy, dyeing the waves with blood?"

"Then, Don Diablo, my task is not yet done, and once more shall the Scarlet Schooner follow your wake, with Nita Sabinas, an avenging Nemesis of the Sea."

Her eyes flashed, her form was drawn up to its full height, the color came back into her face, and the Wreckers gazed upon her with absolute awe, and in dread silence, for they knew not why the woman that some of their number remembered as the one love of Don Diablo's life, had so changed as to wish to hunt him to death.

"Men, hear me!" she cried, vehemently, and all bowed in silence.

"You live here the life of cowards, luring vessels to ruin for a paltry booty you gain from them, and it is unworthy of you."

"I intend to sweep the seas, and hunt from off its blue face the scourge of mankind, Don Diablo, the Rover."

"You say he has retaken the Sea Gipsy, his old schooner."

"Pledge yourselves to come with me, and I pledge myself to place you on the deck of as fleet a vessel as the Sea Gipsy, and to fill your pockets with gold by the capture of a human monster, and to gain pardon for you from the United States."

"Have no league but our own, and when Don Diablo has been strangled on the gallows, then haul down your lawless flag, and seek to live under the ensign of an honest nation."

"I follow your lead, Nita Sabinas, and justly do you deserve to become a Nemesis, and I, too, an avenger."

The speaker stepped down into the cabin, and was evidently the leader of the Wreckers.

But, with one glance into his face, Nita Sabinas started back with a cry of horror, for in the handsome, stern, and sad face before her, she beheld *Conrado Mariál, The Leaper*.

There was no mistaking his face and form—is was Estevan, the Conspirator, the same whom Don Diablo had forced to walk the plank for warning her against him.

CHAPTER I.

GOLD AND REVENGE IN THE BALANCE.

Colonel Fernando Navaro sat in his elegant quarters, plotting some new scheme to "raise the wind," or in other words to get funds to pay his gambling debts.

He had ascended the ladder of promotion two grades, since the flight of the schooner Wizard

from the harbor of Vera Cruz, with Don Diablo at the helm, and by plot and counterplot had not only kept his head above water in public opinion, but had managed to convince the Government that he was absolutely necessary to its safety and proper advancement.

If his name was connected with anything that was "off color," the colonel-commandante always came out untarnished.

But money he spent like water, and his extravagant mode of life and gambling demanded large sums of him to keep him going.

Time touched him lightly, and the evil heart within was carefully hidden from public view, and his face bore no trace of wickedness.

Upon the morning when he is again called to the notice of the reader, Colonel Navaro was ill at ease.

He had gambled largely and lost, and had spent considerable sums, until he had drawn upon the Government fund in his keeping, and pay-day had come when he must make it good.

Presently a servant entered and announced a visitor.

"Who is it, Jaquez?" he asked.

"A lady, señor colonel, and deeply veiled."

"Ah! how do I look, Jaqu-z?"

"A little haggard, from late hours, señor colonel, but very handsome."

"Yes; I feared this brown silk dressing-gown was not becoming; it looks well, then, does it?"

"Beautiful, señor."

"Show the lady in, Jaquez."

The confidential servant of Colonel Navaro disappeared, but soon returned and ushered into the room a lady of slender, graceful form, and superb carriage, though with a somewhat haughty toss of the head.

"The Señor Colonel Navaro, I believe?" she said, in a voice of remarkable sweetness.

"Yes, lady; in what can I serve you?"

"Are we alone?" was the cautious question.

"Well, yes."

"Is there any doubt of it, Colonel Navaro?"

The commandante got a little nervous, for his conscience was not a good one by any means.

"No, we are alone, señora."

"I believe, Colonel Navaro, that you are embarrassed financially?" was the bold question.

"I?" and the colonel started, for he was not one to admit he ever needed money.

"Yes, señor."

"Who could have told you such a thing, señora?"

"It matters not; but I happen to know that you are heavily in debt, and I have come to show you a way to get clear of your financial difficulties."

"Why, what sweet angel is this that thus comes to me with words of cheer?"

"I am not a sweet angel, Colonel Navaro, but on the contrary a sinful, designing woman."

"I cannot permit such slander of yourself from lips so fair; but permit me to see beyond that naughty veil," and the colonel made a step forward.

But the voice, clear and resolute, checked him:

"I am not on exhibition, Colonel Navaro, but to serve you, and in so doing I serve myself."

"Enough! your words and manner tell me you have something to propose."

"I have."

"I am listening, señora."

"You have heard of Don Diablo lately?"

Colonel Navaro started visibly, but answered angrily, while his face turned pale:

"Who has not? After the seas had had a rest for a while he is now at his old trade again."

"He has of late committed a very bold act in your harbor, I believe?"

"Yes; the Government bought from the Americans the Sea Gipsy, Don Diablo's old craft, and the one that captured him; they are sister vessels, and were acting as a coast guard; but Don Diablo, who certainly can boast of having nine lives, came in here in a trading lugger, ran afoul of his old vessel, and boarded her with nearly a hundred men, while, to make good his escape, he sent the lugger flying out of the harbor, and pretended to be pursuing with the schooner."

"A bold deed surely."

"A man such as he is can only do such deeds."

"In some way he learned that the castle was being repaired on the side on which he escaped, and this aided him of course, while the officer in command of D'Uloa turned what guns he could upon the lugger, believing that to be the one to fire at of course."

"This has caused your Government to offer a reward of a hundred thousand pesos for the pirate's head, I believe?"

"There is an offer of that kind."

"Will it be paid?"

"What! have you knowledge of Don Diablo?"

"I have."

"You, a woman?"

"Why not?"

"I see no reason why you should not, if you are beautiful."

"I am beautiful."

With the words she threw back the dark veil, and Colonel Navaro fairly started at the loveliness revealed; but it was a face to fear as well as adore, yet he saw only its beauty.

"In the name of the Virgin, who are you, señora?" asked the Mexican, with a stare of admiration he could not withdraw from her face.

"I am a Cuban, señor colonel, whose life Don Diablo wholly wrecked, whose father and brother he killed, and who seeks only to revenge herself upon him," she said, in a suppressed voice.

"But you have a name, señora?"

"Call me the Nemesis of the Sea, for I ply the blue waters only for revenge."

"And you know of this Don Diablo?"

"Yes, I know his haunts, and I can take you there."

"Where is he, señora?"

"Where only I can find him, señor."

"You will not tell?"

"I will pilot you there, and more, I will give to you the reward offered for him dead or alive."

"I would rather have him killed than taken alive."

"I will never take him alive, señor, though he must know who his slayer is."

"You do indeed hate him, señora?"

"More intensely than I once loved him, Colonel Navaro."

"And you offer to give to me the reward for the head of this man?"

"Yes, every peso."

"If I aid you?"

"Of course."

"Show me how I can?"

"Take with you a hundred soldiers on the schooner-of-war now in the harbor."

"She has her crew."

"You will need more, for the attack must be made both by land and water."

"And when?"

"The first night of storm I will run the schooner into the secret bay."

"Why in a storm?"

"On calm nights a watch is kept; when it blows there is no need of it, for no vessel can enter the bay without a skilled pilot."

"And you are such a one?"

"Yes, I know the channel the darkest night."

"Pardon me for looking at the matter in a business light; but what guarantee have I that I will get these rewards, if Don Diablo is taken?" said the sordid officer.

"You shall lead the expedition, and, as its chief you can claim the reward, and also get the credit of having run the pirate to his lair."

"I am simply your pilot."

"Enough; and revenge is all you ask for your services?"

"Yes, señor colonel."

"I am content; you take your revenge, and I will take the money."

The woman smiled scornfully, but made no reply, and Colonel Navaro asked:

"When will you be ready?"

"Within the hour."

"Where will I meet you?"

"I will come here; but remember, I will go in male attire, and you are alone to know my sex."

"As you please, señora; do but place that man in my power and I will bow down and worship you."

"For the gold I bring you, señor?"

"No, for your beauty."

"Ah, señor colonel, gold, though stained with blood, is far more valuable in man's eyes than beauty tarnished with dishonor."

"The one can be polished to shine like the sun, but from the other the rust will never wear off," she said, sadly.

"You speak strangely, señora," said the man, impressed by her words and manner.

"I speak truly, Colonel Navaro," and she turned toward the door, adding:

"Within an hour I will return and send in my name; it will be simply *Nemesis*."

"And I will send at once to the schooner and have her gotten ready, and order out picked men from the barracks."

"Adios, señora," and in spite of himself Colonel Navaro was forced to show the beautiful woman the deepest respect.

Returning to his room, the Mexican's face fairly shone with the joy he felt, and he muttered, gleefully:

"Now once more I can pay my debts, and then an end to gambling."

"With the *clat* of capturing Don Diablo I will be a lion, be promoted, win a fortune at a stroke, and, by the Cross! I will marry that beautiful being even though she be the cast-off bride of a corsair."

"But there is one thing I must do, and that is, kill Reno Quesada, the pirate chief, for if I do not he may let out some ugly secrets."

"Yes, he must die, if I drive the knife to his heart after he is in irons," and the glitter in the dark eyes showed that Colonel Fernando Navaro was fully equal to the duty he set himself to perform, in case Don Diablo fell not in the fray.

CHAPTER LI.

THE NEMESIS AT THE HELM.

NOT many leagues from the Cuban coast there is an island, with bold, rocky shores, which looks very uninviting to one sailing near in a vessel.

Sunken reefs surround it in many places, with numerous little rock-islands rearing their dangerous heads above the sea, and causing the cautious sailor to give the place a wide berth.

The seamen of the long ago were wont to call the large island, with its attendant smaller ones, the "Hen and Chickens," and not inappropriately so, as they had the appearance of a barn-yard fowl and her little brood.

To the one who knew the narrow, tortuous and most dangerous channel running into the island, a different scene would present itself, for there was a small inlet, a creek, going into the very center of the rocky walls that surrounded the isle, and once here a quiet basin was found in which a dozen vessels could lie at anchor, or be moored alongside a ledge of stone.

Fronting on this ledge were several large caverns that extended back in the hills and formed a safe retreat.

The secrets of this island were known at one time only to the buccaneers, and very few of these could guide a vessel through the channel even in calm weather.

But, having had traitors in their midst, the island, as a rendezvous, was given up by the buccaneers, and here it was that Howard De Vigne, the son of Don Diablo, had his haunt when he was searching the seas for his cruel father, which the reader of "Don Diablo" will well remember.

While Nita Sabinas, in her disguise of cabin-boy, was on the Red Schooner, she had thoroughly learned the secrets of the island and its channels, and here it was that she was going to take Colonel Navaro in the schooner, on the search for the pirate chief.

One stormy night, a week after her interview with Colonel Navaro in Vera Cruz, a schooner, under close-reefed sails, was approaching the "Hen and Chickens" islands.

Her qualities as a staunch craft were being put to the test, for a wild sea was running, and a gale blowing, and yet the vessel was behaving splendidly, and standing up like a line-of-battle ship.

Her decks were crowded with men, her guns were firmly lashed, and all sail not set was closely furled, while at her helm stood but one person, and he apparently a youth, though several officers, with their cloaks drawn closely around them, were standing near.

That all on board, excepting one person, were anxious, could be seen by their restless motions, and the eager way they strained their eyes over the dark waters, and then turned them upon the helmsman, who was the one that appeared not to dread the night or its dangers.

"I fear you have a hard task, Nemesis, to run in here to night," said one of the officers standing near, and upon whose face the binnacle light falling, revealed Colonel Fernando Navaro.

"No, sir, I can run in readily."

"Better wait until morning."

"I am not at fault, señor."

"But I can see nothing, and in the daylight—"

"The pirates can see us," was the laconic interruption.

"True, but I would be willing to fight them, as the schooner has eighty men, and I have a hundred soldiers."

"If we did not surprise the buccaneers you would need them all, señor."

"You are the pilot, so go ahead; but we are taking big chances," and Colonel Navaro turned away to watch the white waters, for they were covered with foam, and the dark, forbidding pile of rock that arose ahead of them.

With the wind on her port beam the schooner was going at a terrific rate of speed; but each rock "chicken" was avoided with consummate skill by the daring helmsman, and darker, higher and more threatening the island rose before them.

At length, it seemed that the schooner must dash directly against the rock, and Colonel Navaro and the naval captain both spoke to the Nemesis.

Instantly came the cool reply:

"If we wished to, señores, we could not go about here, as there is not room; but do you mark how white the foam is off our starboard and port bows, where the waves dash against the rock?"

"Yes, it is just what we do not like."

"Do you note that dead ahead you see no white foam?"

"True," said both officers.

"Well, there is the inlet."

The next moment the schooner, instead of dashing herself to pieces against the side of the rock, as it seemed she would, glided straight into the inlet's mouth, and winding around a curve, was in quiet water.

Forging ahead, from the speed with which she dashed in, she went gently alongside the ledge of rocks and came to a standstill.

The ledge was just the height of the bulwarks, and springing out the crew made her fast.

"Now, señor colonel, follow me," said the helmsman, in whom the reader has already recognized Nita Sabinas, the Sea Nemesis.

"Fall in, men!" came the stern order from Colonel Navaro.

"Ready, lads!" said the schooner's captain to his crew.

The next moment, with the Nemesis at their head, and holding a dark lantern in his hand, the party moved off, and entered one of the caverns opening upon the ledge.

CHAPTER LII.

THE PLOT OF THE NEMESIS.

WITH his dark-lantern sending forth a weird glare, and causing many wild figures, the forms of the marching men, to dance in fantastic style upon the rocky walls of the cavern, the Nemesis led the way.

The cavern narrowed as they went, and at times became but a hallway, to again widen into vast dimensions, and open into large rotundas, from which branched off a score of passages.

"I hope you know your way in here, Nemesis," whispered Colonel Navaro.

"As well as I know the channel to the island, señor."

"Lead on, I am satisfied."

And again they moved on in silence, until Colonel Navaro once more spoke:

"How far is it to the glen that this black hole leads to?"

"Some few cables' length from here, señor."

"And the camp of the pirates is there?"

"Yes, señor, the cabins are in the glen."

"And they keep no guard at the cavern entrance?"

"Why should they, señor? No vessel can come in."

"True; lead on!"

Once more they moved forward, until again the colonel asked:

"How many men did you say were on the island?"

"Seventy-five."

"And we have one hundred and seventy-five with us."

"And the advantage of a surprise."

"True, but they will fight like devils."

"All men will, señor, for their lives; but go in single file here, for let me show you what is on either side of us."

The Nemesis turned and held her lantern so as to show that they were on a narrow ledge of rock running through the cavern, and as far as the eye could see down upon either side was blackness.

Colonel Navaro shuddered, and said:

"How deep are these holes of Hades?"

"Only some twenty or thirty feet, and they are full of water, for the tide runs in under the island; but there goes my lantern!"

The lantern fell with a crash and rolled into the pit, striking with a splash in the water.

"Don't move for your lives, señores!" called out the Nemesis, and all stood like statues.

"Where are you, Nemesis?" cried Colonel Navaro.

But no reply came.

"Nemesis!"

Still no answer.

"Señor Nemesis, did you hear me call?"

Dead silence followed.

"Good God! has he fallen into the pit?"

"No, señor colonel," said the captain.

"How know you, Captain Beldas?" asked Navaro, fretfully.

"Had he done so, we would have heard him fall."

"True," and again raising his voice Colonel Navaro shouted:

"Nemesis!"

No answer.

They waited in silence a moment, and then, in a voice hoarse with passion, Colonel Fernando Navaro said:

"Señor Beldas, we have been entrapped."

"It would seem so, Colonel Navaro."

"And by a woman."

"A woman, señor?"

"Yes, a woman."

"Who was she?"

"The one that just deserted us."

"I thought that—"

"You thought wrong, my nice Captain Beldas; that was not a boy, but a woman, and a beautiful one, too."

"Her name is Nita Sabinas."

"You surprise me, señor."

"She has just surprised me; but she came to me in Vera Cruz, and told me she acted from revenge against Don Diablo, and I trusted her, came here, and here we are."

"And likely to stay until morning."

"Yes, for a move may send us to the devil."

"And the pirates may come."

"Oh, I expect them."

"And we dare not move?"

"Oh no! we are like rats in a trap."

"Worse, for they can see out, and we cannot."

"What's to be done, señor?"

"Stand right here until morning, or the pirates come and shoot us."

This was by no means a pleasant prospect; but what could they do else?

And there they stood like statues, afraid to move for fear of death, expecting the pirates each moment, and silently swearing and praying by turns.

Like days seemed the hours, as they dragged away, and at times the men believed that day had come, and that darkness ever rested in the cavern.

But at last there was a dim, gray light visible, and watching it eagerly all saw it increase, until at last the faces of each other became visible, and all could see their way, and then discovered how dangerous had been their position.

The glass of the broken lantern lay at Colonel Navaro's feet, but the holder of it was gone. Following the track of the greatest light, they soon came out into a small glen, and gazed into each other's haggard faces.

Before them was a small valley, only a couple of acres in size, and fully a dozen rude cabins met their view.

Within these cabins not a soul was visible, though it was evident that they had been very lately occupied.

"Back to the schooner!" shouted Colonel Navaro, and back through the cavern they soon wended their way, and in ten minutes came out upon the ledge that overlooked the basin.

"The schooner is gone!"

The cry broke from every lip, and every face grew black with passion.

But against the ledge lay a polacca of some seventy tons' burden, and toward this Colonel Navaro and the others went.

There was not a soul on board, and pinned to the tiller was a piece of paper.

Seizing it, Colonel Navaro read aloud what was written there in a fine, feminine hand.

It was as follows:

"MIDNIGHT."

"COLONEL FERNANDO NAVARO:

"Señor:—Pardon me for putting you to any inconvenience, but as I desired a craft exactly like the one which Don Diablo, the pirate, so cleverly robbed your Government of, and had not the time to have such a one built, I took the liberty of borrowing the beautiful vessel in whose cabin I now write you these lines.

"I say *borrowing*, for I intend to return it, or failing to do so, its value to the Government.

"Not to desert you fully, after my plot to get possession of the schooner, I leave you a staunch, swift-sailing polacca, and she is provisioned for a month, so you will not suffer.

"As I am unable to leave you a pilot, I beg leave to say that you can only depart from this island on a calm day, when the tide is running out.

"Then put your boats ahead and *to go out*, setting no sail, and heading directly for the *fifth 'chicken'* from the east; when you round that, with your helm aport, head for the ninth chicken and leave it on your starboard, when you will be in clear water.

"With regret at having deprived Captain Beldas, whom I esteem as a gentleman and brave officer, and with no sympathy for you, whom I despise, I remain, Colonel Fernando Navaro's foe,

"THE NEMESIS OF THE SEA."

CHAPTER LIII.

THE SCARLET SCHOONER.

IT would be impossible to portray with words, or the pen, the wild fury of Colonel Navaro and his followers, after reading the letter left by the Nemesis of the Sea.

The officers swore, the men growled, and genuine anger was felt, and oaths of revenge against the woman were upon every lip.

Remembering that he had but compromised his debts for a short time, and upon his return that the crash would come, if he had not money, Colonel Navaro was nearly beside himself, and seemed upon the verge of madness.

As the wind was blowing a gale they dared not run out in the polacca, so had to content themselves with remaining.

But the next day and the next the weather was still bad, and not until the fifth after their arrival did they dare venture out.

Then, following the instructions given by the Nemesis, they safely gained deep water.

The polacca was a good sailer they found, but she was small, and they were very uncomfortable from the crowd on board.

Then, to add to their discomfort, a hurricane arose, and they were blown into the Caribbean sea, and from thence around the peninsula of Yucatan had unceasing headwinds.

At last fair weather set in; but it seemed that Satan still dogged their wake, as one night a vessel was seen in the distance, which at once gave chase.

The polacca was put back on her course, and fled under full sail; but the stranger gained steadily, and at dawn was not a mile distant.

Then, with the full light shining upon her, all on board the polacca looked at each other in amazement, and then again at the strange vessel.

"What can it mean?"

This was the question upon every lip, and no wonder, for the strange craft was *scarlet*.

It was a schooner of beautiful model, carrying the canvas of a racing yacht, armed, and sailing like a witch.

But from hull to topmast she was a bright scarlet.

Nearer and nearer she came to the polacca, though every inch of canvas was set, and the sails were wet to make them draw better.

In dire alarm those on the polacca watched and waited.

They were armed only with their pistols, muskets and cutlasses, and could hope to offer no resistance to the heavy guns of the stranger, though if boarded, they knew there were enough of them to render a good account of themselves.

As the Scarlet Schooner drew nearer all on board the polacca, even to Colonel Navaro and Captain Beldas, began to feel a superstitious dread of her.

They could see that she was almost in their wake, and though only her lower sails set, was coming along at a pace that was remarkable, for the polacca was fast and sailing well.

Upon her decks her men were visible at her guns, and all on board the red craft seemed ready for action.

Nearer and nearer she came until only a few hundred feet divided the two vessels.

Yet no notice whatever had she taken of the polacca, other than to follow her, and a cable's length to leeward.

Nearer and nearer until the low hull, long, gaunt and asred as blood, was distinctly visible.

Her ports were open, and from them protruded guns, and they also were of the same scarlet hue, as were also the carriages, the stacks of iron balls piled up on each side the ports, the deck and inside of the bulwarks.

The masts were long, raking, and painted a fiery red, as were also the spars, while the sails reflected back the sunlight from the same scarlet hue.

Nor was this all, for crimson was the tinge upon everything, even to the wheel, at which stood two helmsmen.

But, strangest of all was the crew, for they were

not only dressed in scarlet suits, but their costume was that of a *mephista*, and standing at the guns were what appeared to be a band of devils.

Upon the quarter-deck were three officers, to judge from their position there, and that they had gold tassels hanging from the red horns on each temple, and wore sashes of gold thread, as insignias of rank.

All these things every man on board the polacca took in with scared eyes, and came to the conclusion that Satan had sailed in his war-ship from the burning lakes of Hades, and had gotten lost on an earthly sea in his cruise for lost souls.

"Look at her flag!" whispered Captain Beldas to Colonel Navaro.

It was flaunting out free with the breeze, and was a black field, with a red gallows, from which drooped a scarlet rope, with noose, hanging ready for a human head.

"Now the flag at the fore," again whispered Captain Beldas.

It was a blue field, representing the waves of the sea, and in the center was a long, slender red serpent, with fiery eyes and head erect, represented as gliding over the waves.

"It is the Red Dukite," said Colonel Navaro, referring to the red serpent on the flag.

"Yes," answered Captain Beldas, and in silence, every man with his arms in his hands, they watched the Scarlet Schooner glide by.

Nearer and nearer, until abeam, then forging ahead, and yet making no sign that they saw the polacca.

At last she glided by, and all drew a long breath, for they saw that the Scarlet Schooner meant them no harm.

"Put her about, quartermaster, and head for Vera Cruz," cried Captain Beldas, impressed with what he had seen, and the polacca was once more headed, for home, and dropped anchor without further adventure.

With fear and trembling, Colonel Navaro went to report all that had occurred, and though it was midnight, was ushered into the presence of his commander.

In silence the Governor listened to the story, and then said, quietly:

"Many sailors have reported seeing the same strange craft, Colonel Navaro, and the superstitious call her a phantom, a myth; but there is one thing that is not a myth, and that is your conduct during the years you have been here, a trusted officer."

"Señor!"

"Hold, sir! no anger, after the career you have pursued of wholesale robbery, gambling, devilry, murder and trickery."

"But, señor comandante, hear—"

"Not one word, sir, for already have your papers been overhauled, your deeds discovered, and you are banished for life to a cell in the Castle of San Juan d'Uloa, and, Fernando Navaro, he who enters there bids farewell to hope."

With a groan the guilty and wicked man sunk down in a chair, murmuring:

"The Nemesis has ruined me, too, for had I not gone away, my deeds would never have been known."

Stepping up to the wretched man, the comandante tore from his uniform his badges of rank, and said, sternly:

"Put him in irons, and carry him to the Life Cell of the Castle!"

One hour after Fernando Navaro had forever bidden farewell to hope; but, though severe, his punishment for his numerous crimes was just.

CHAPTER LIV.

AT LAST.

A FIERCE hurricane was sweeping over the Caribbean sea, driving huge walls of water before it, and heading toward the southern coast of Cuba.

In the midst of the wild scene a vessel was driving along under bare poles at a pace that was fearful and threatened to send her headlong beneath the waves.

It was an armed schooner, as trim a vessel as any seaman would care to look upon, well armed, everything about her ship-shape, yet manned with as savage a crew of human beings as ever swept over blue water under canvas.

Crouching down under the bulwarks for shelter, clinging to the masts, ratlines, or gun-lashings for safety, they were a wild, reckless set of men, well fit to be under the command of the tall, dark-faced, stern, cruel-eyed man who stood near the helmsman at the wheel.

That man was Don Diablo, the Terror of the Seas, who, once more aloft in a stanch and fleet craft, had spread more fear than ever before on land and water, and each hour of his life seemed to have become a greater fiend, until the reckless devils under his command feared him as they did Satan himself.

"Well, señor captain, I think she has gone down," said an officer, who had been leaning over the taff-rail, eagerly gazing astern over the wind-lashed waters.

"The Devil, my master, grant you do not lie, Catalena."

"I say so, too, señor chief, for I am, I confess, getting most nervous at the way this Scarlet Phantom has dogged our wake for months," answered the lieutenant addressed as Catalena by Don Diablo.

"If he would only fight us, I would not care; but to continually hang on our wake, until we turn upon him, and then sail away, keeping just out of range, I confess it makes me feel as though I was being haunted for all the red deeds I had ever done."

"And I guess," added Catalena, in a low tone, not intended for his chief's ear, "the blood you have caused to flow would float the schooner, and paint her crimson, too," and, still gazing at his chief, he continued:

"Don Diablo has broken more in the past few months than in years before."

*The Red Dukite is a remarkable serpent seen only in the South seas; it is said to have the faculty of reason, and is really beautiful, with its long, slender scarlet body, and bright eyes, but as venomous as an adder.

The natives say that two always go together, and if one is killed, the other follows his slayer day and night, tracking him like a bloodhound, until he buries his fangs in his flesh.—THE AUTHOR.

"His face seems haggard now, and always cruel, while his eyes have lost the tenderness he once could assume at will."

"Then his hair is white on the temples, and not yet is he forty-five; I verily believe it is this Scarlet Schooner, so constantly dogging him, that is killing him."

"Well, the world will rejoice when he goes, that is certain."

"Catalena!"

"Señor!"

"I believe the Scarlet Schooner has gone under, for she was lying broadside to, when the hurricane struck her, and we nearly were lost though we met her with our bows on."

"It looks so, señor chief."

"If she lives out this blow I will believe her commander is the devil, his crew demons, and give up piracy and turn padre."

"I confess I would like to give up this red life, señor, for I have laid aside enough of my earnings—"

"Your honest earnings," sneered Don Diablo.

"Yes, señor, from my honest earnings, I have laid aside enough to support me."

"I never have, for not a peso have I outside of this craft."

"I have fought from love of excitement, robbed for mere pastime, killed from sheer enjoyment in taking life, and though I have stolen millions I am not worth enough to give the padre to pray my soul out of purgatory—Great God! see there!"

"It is the Scarlet Schooner," cried Catalena, glancing astern, when, a long way back, was seen a red craft, the very counterpart of the pirate vessel, except in color, coming on before the gale under her storm-sails only.

"And he has his red sails set, while we can hardly live under bare poles," said Catalena.

"Yes, but he can live anywhere, for, Catalena, that craft is a scarlet phantom."

Struck by the tone of his chief's voice, the buccaneer lieutenant turned to look at him, and was startled at the change he saw there.

The face was livid, the lips blue and trembling, the eyes wild and staring, and the whole face indicative of fearful terror, a terror that is awful to behold in a man's face.

"Señor chief, you are not well; go into the cabin and take a drink of brandy," said the lieutenant.

"I will, Catalena, for I am not well; but see, that phantom pursues me! see! its red wings are flapping, flapping over me—save me, Catalena!" cried the man, in piteous accents.

The startled lieutenant sprang to his side and cried:

"Control yourself, Don Diablo, for the Scarlet Schooner is crowding on sail to attack us, for we have never had her this near before."

With a wild cry Don Diablo sprang toward the cabin, and disappeared down the companionway.

And there Catalena found him, crouching on his knees in the corner, his teeth chattering together, his sunken eyes rolling wildly, and his whole attitude and actions those of a man gone mad.

In vain he told him that the storm had abated, and that the schooner was making fleet time; his chief only chattered on in a rambling way.

Then he told him that the Scarlet Schooner was rushing on to attack them.

"Keep it off! Keep it off, for I dare not meet a spirit crew," yelled the chief, in agony.

"Hark! señor, we are firing upon the stranger. Come on deck and fight it out, for she also fires, as you hear."

"No, no, I will fight men, but not devils, the spirits of those I have slain. Oh, hide me, good Catalena."

In despair the lieutenant rushed on deck to find the Scarlet Schooner not half a mile away, and looking grandly beautiful, yet terrible as she came on under clouds of crimson canvas, and sending from her gun-muzzles at every flash puffs of blood-red smoke.

The crew of the corsair were at their guns; but their pallid faces showed the terror they felt, and that they believed they were not going to meet human beings in combat, for in those days superstition had a strong hold even upon the minds of the intelligent masses.

With a bold front Catalena determined to meet his adversary, and he ordered the gunners to open lively.

But his shots flew wide, while the red shot of the Scarlet Schooner went crashing through his bulwarks, and staining his decks with a current of the same crimson hue that they were.

Nearer and nearer the Scarlet Phantom, as the pirates now called her, came, and as the sea had now run down, and only a seven-knot breeze was blowing, it was evident that her crew intended to board.

Nearer and nearer, until the crew, dressed like red devils, stood crowding in the bows to board, for the Scarlet Schooner was sailing directly in the corsair's wake.

Presently a rattling of chains, a flying of red grapnels, and the Scarlet Schooner was lashed to the corsair, and the red forms were pouring over her bows to the attack.

Cries of mercy came from the corsairs, and it was indeed an easy victory, for the outlaws seemed benumbed with dread, and their brave lieutenant was cut down while in vain striving to hold his deck.

"Hold! kill no man who does not resist," cried a ringing, clear voice, and at once every weapon was lowered.

"Now where is your chief, Don Diablo?" asked the same speaker, who was dressed in a suit of crimson velvet.

And one glance into that face, and upon that beautiful, slender form, was sufficient to recognize Nita Sabinas, the Nemesis of the Sea.

"He retreated to the cabin before the combat, and would not lead us," said a pirate, in answer to her question.

"Don Diablo a coward? No, no, that cannot be," said the Nemesis.

"He feared your vessel was a phantom."

"Ah! then at last his lion heart is crushed, and I have gained my revenge. Come, Señor Conrado, let us seek this chief."

Conrado El Saltador, who was the first officer of the Nemesis, at once followed her to the cabin, and both stood dumb with horror at what they beheld there.

Crouching in the corner, his face deathlike in hue, his eyes rolling, his hair whitened in the hour that had passed, and great beads of sweat dropping from his brow, was the once magnificent Don Diablo, the dreaded pirate chief.

He turned his sunken eyes upon the intruders, and cried in a voice that was piteously pleading:

"Spare me, oh spare me, ye souls that I have slain! I am a coward now, and I beg you to go away and leave me alone—no, not alone, or I shall go mad, for my brain is on fire, my heart is burning up, and I suffer, oh, so much."

"Don Diablo, look on me!"

"Good God! are you dead, for you are Nita, my wife. Yes, you are dead, but I did not kill you—yes, I must have done so, for you are among the returned spirits that I have slain. Yes, I killed you by breaking your heart; but I loved you, Nita, and you are all I ever did love."

"Back! Don't come near me, or I shall go mad, my brain is so hot."

"See, I have a band of red-hot iron around it—oh! do not thrust that dagger in my heart—let it go! take off your hands, ye hundreds of red phantoms that I have slain, and do not all clutch the dagger's hilt together, for the blade is in my heart."

"Don Diablo, I am avenged, for at last your heart is broken, and your crimes have driven you mad. Now, seeing you the pitiable object you have become, I can forgive you your sin toward me."

Nita Sabinas moved, as she spoke, toward the chief; but with a shriek of terror he bounded to his feet, and dashing out of the companionway, sprang into the sea, his mad cries shut off by the gurgling waters as he sunk down forever beneath them.

Like a statue stood the Nemesis, her face as white as marble, until Conrado Estevan stepped toward her and said:

"Come, Nita, the end is accomplished; let us go from here."

"Yes, let us go from here," she answered, mechanically, and El Saltador ordered sail set on the two vessels, and, just as night fell upon the sea, they glided away over the dark waters.

CHAPTER LV.

CONCLUSION.

ONE morning, some ten days after the death of Don Diablo, Vera Cruz was enveloped in a dense fog, which also shut out from view the gloomy old fortress known as the Castle of San Juan d'Uloa.

When the fog lifted from the waters the sentinel on the battlements of the castle raised an alarm at beholding two vessels lying at anchor within musket range.

One of these vessels was red from keel to truck, and the other, its counterpart in build, rig and armament, was black, and showed signs of having been in severe action.

Upon the decks of either vessel not a human being was visible; but when the guard-boat put off to them they found in the hold of the crimson craft three-score prisoners in irons.

In the cabin, on the table, was a letter addressed to "Colonel Navaro, a life prisoner in the Castle of San Juan d'Uloa."

Opening this the officer of the guard-boat read as follows:

"According to my promise I return to your Government the vessel I borrowed, and which served me well as the Scarlet Schooner."

"Also, I return her sister-raft taken from Don Diablo, the pirate, and his crew in irons, the hated chief having gone mad, and ended his own life, a very fitting thing for you to do to escape from haunting memories. THE NEMESIS OF THE SEA."

Some years, kind reader, after the capture of Don Diablo by the Scarlet Schooner, an American vessel-of-war ran into a small bay on the southern shores of Cuba and dropped anchor, as if to repair damages, for there was evidence that she had been severely handled by a tornado.

The bay where she anchored is a familiar one, for it lies in front of the Villa del Florida, the old home of Nita Sabinas.

But though ruin once seized the place with rude touch, after the death of its master and his heir, it had again put on the same beautiful look as in the olden time.

And lured by its beauties the young captain of the vessel went ashore, and wandering through the shady paths came suddenly upon an orange bower in which sat several persons, a dark-faced gentleman, a beautiful lady and two children.

They arose at seeing him, not having, from their bower, seen the cruiser come into the bay, and he offered apologies at his intrusion, which the señora interrupted by saying:

"Are you not Captain Guy Stanhope, señor, of the American navy?"

"Yes, señora," was the answer in perfect Spanish.

"I am glad to again meet you, señor, for we have met before."

"I am Nita Sabinas that was, but now I am the Señora Estevan, and this is my husband, Don Conrado Marial Estevan, and these are my children."

It was a pleasant meeting between the handsome young captain and the Cuban señora, but the thoughts of each ran back to the bitter past.

But Captain Stanhope became the guest of Don Estevan and his still beautiful wife, and passed days at the pleasant home; but then, and afterward, he could not forget the shadow that hung over it, and shut out perfect happiness irrevocably from its hearthstone.

THE END.

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